

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

See, my servant shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high.
Just as there were many who were astonished at him
--so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of mortals--
so he shall startle many nations;
kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
for that which had not been told them they shall see,
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
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.
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.

All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.
They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain.
When you make his life an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.
Out of his anguish he shall see light;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Psalm 22

Deus, Deus meus

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? *

and are so far from my cry
and from the words of my distress?
2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer; *
by night as well, but I find no rest.
3 Yet you are the Holy One, *
enthroned upon the praises of Israel.
4 Our forefathers put their trust in you; *
they trusted, and you delivered them.
5 They cried out to you and were delivered; *
they trusted in you and were not put to shame.
6 But as for me, I am a worm and no man, *
scorned by all and despised by the people.
7 All who see me laugh me to scorn; *
they curl their lips and wag their heads, saying,
8 "He trusted in the Lord; let him deliver him; *
let him rescue him, if he delights in him."
9 Yet you are he who took me out of the womb, *
and kept me safe upon my mother's breast.
10 I have been entrusted to you ever since I was born; *
you were my God when I was still in my mother's womb.
11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near, *
and there is none to help.
12 Many young bulls encircle me; *
strong bulls of Bashan surround me.
13 They open wide their jaws at me, *
like a ravening and a roaring lion.
14 I am poured out like water;
all my bones are out of joint; *
my heart within my breast is melting wax.
15 My mouth is dried out like a pot-sherd;
my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; *
and you have laid me in the dust of the grave.

16 Packs of dogs close me in,
and gangs of evildoers circle around me; *
they pierce my hands and my feet;
I can count all my bones.
17 They stare and gloat over me; *
they divide my garments among them;
they cast lots for my clothing.
18 Be not far away, O Lord; *
you are my strength; hasten to help me.
19 Save me from the sword, *
my life from the power of the dog.
20 Save me from the lion's mouth, *
my wretched body from the horns of wild bulls.
21 I will declare your Name to my brethren; *
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.
22 Praise the Lord, you that fear him; *
stand in awe of him, O offspring of Israel;
all you of Jacob's line, give glory.
23 For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty;
neither does he hide his face from them; *
but when they cry to him he hears them.
24 My praise is of him in the great assembly; *
I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.
25 The poor shall eat and be satisfied,
and those who seek the Lord shall praise him: *
"May your heart live for ever!"
26 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, *
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.
27 For kingship belongs to the Lord; *
he rules over the nations.
28 To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship; *
all who go down to the dust fall before him.

29 My soul shall live for him;
my descendants shall serve him; *
they shall be known as the Lord's for ever.
30 They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn *
the saving deeds that he has done.

Hebrews 10:16-25

The Holy Spirit testifies saying,

"This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds,"

he also adds,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

or

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

The Gospel

John 18:1-19:42

Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are

not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God."

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor."

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When

the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

"They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

If we stay on the road we are on," the Chinese proverb teaches, "we shall surely get where we are going." And in that lies both the victory and the defeat of everything. Doing good, good will prevail. Doing nothing, nothing will prevail.

Cross and the Lynching Tree

Michael Hyman on reconciliation when there was no conciliation

No one avoids the wilderness on the way to the promised land--Annie Dillard

Here God is not approached as an object that we must love, but as a mystery present in the very act of love itself.

Peter Rollins

Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God's will.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Nobody escapes being wounded. We are all wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not, 'How can we hide our wounds?' so we don't have to be embarrassed, but 'How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?' When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.

Henri Nouwen

If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. If you want to know what it means to be human, look at Jesus. If you want to know what love is, look at Jesus. If you want to know what grief is, look at Jesus. And go on looking until you're not just a spectator, but you're actually part of the drama which has him as the central character.

N. T. Wright

Why call this day "Good"? It is not good.

Perhaps that's why we turn the cross into an instrument of divine justice and punishment rather than seeing it as an expression of the deepest kind of sacrificial love. I mean, we'd expect a holy, just, and powerful God to demand punishment for sin. So Jesus standing in for us and taking our punishment makes a certain sense. It's what we expect. But perhaps our imagination has been so shaped by the systems of power of the world that we can only imagine God as a mighty king offended by the sin of his subjects.

Yet if we take the countless stories Luke shares about Jesus and, more importantly, Jesus' words about God and God's kingdom seriously, then we might be grow more accustomed to God doing the unexpected. God just forgiving us out of love rather than demanding satisfaction first. God acting more like a desperate parent than an angry monarch. God reaching out again and again in love and mercy rather than exacting retribution.--DL

It is God in solidarity with the pain of the world, it seems, much more than God the omnipotent who, with a flick of the hand, overcomes all pain. But Jesus walks the victim

journey in an extraordinary way. He neither plays the victim card himself for his own aggrandizement, nor does he victimize anybody else, even his murderers. He forgives them all.--Richard Rohr

Moses to raise up a snake on a standard, and “anyone who has been bitten by a serpent and looks upon it will be healed” (Numbers 21:8). The very thing that was killing them is the thing that will heal them! This is the nature of vaccines and other medicines that give us just enough of the disease so we can develop a resistance and be healed from it. The cross was meant to be an inoculation against all sacralized violence and hatred. *The cross dramatically reveals the problem of ignorant killing to inoculate us against doing the same thing.*--rr

French philosopher and historian René Girard (1923–2015) recognized this highly effective ritual across cultures and saw the scapegoat mechanism as a foundational principle for most social groups. The image of the scapegoat powerfully mirrors and reveals the universal, but largely unconscious, human need to transfer our guilt onto something or someone else by singling that other out for unmerited negative treatment. This pattern is seen in many facets of our society and our private, inner lives—so much so that we could almost name it “the sin of the world” (note that “sin” is singular in John 1:29). The biblical account, however, seems to recognize that only a “lamb of a God” can both reveal and resolve that sin in one nonviolent act.--rr

We should recognize our own negativity and sinfulness, but instead we largely hate or blame almost anything else. Sadly, we often find the best cover for that projection in religion. God has been used to justify violence and hide from the parts of ourselves and our religions that we’d rather ignore. As Jesus said, “When anyone kills you, they will think they are doing a holy duty for God” (John 16:2).--rr

He did not come to change God’s mind about us. It did not need changing. Jesus came to change our minds about God—and about ourselves—and about where goodness and evil really lie.--rr

Is it a heavenly transaction on God’s side, or is it more an agenda that God gives us for our side?

Jesus is, in effect, saying, “This is how evil is transformed into good. I am going to take the worst thing and turn it into the best thing, so you will never be victimized, destroyed, or helpless again! I am giving YOU the victory over death.”

There is no such thing as redemptive violence. Violence doesn't save; it only destroys—in both short and long term. Jesus replaced the myth of redemptive violence with the truth of redemptive suffering. He showed us on the cross how to hold the pain and let it transform us, rather than pass it on to others around us.

Evil is not overcome by attack or even avoidance, but by union at a higher level. It is overcome not by fight or flight, but rather by “fusion.”

Good Friday Sermon

Friday, April 19, 2019

Thirty years ago this day the disturbing case known as the Central Park jogger gained national attention. The assault and rape of Trisha Meili gripped New York City, leaving her in a coma for 12 days, and the city dealing with one of the most publicized crimes of the 1980s. The case is also known as the Central Park Five, a reference to the five teenage boys--four African American and one Hispanic--arrested the night of the 19th for the crime against Ms. Meili. With such an atrocity, somebody had to be held accountable. Tragically, the Central Park Five were not the perpetrators. Like so many other solved and unsolved cases before and since, they were the scapegoats for a public seething for justice in the aftermath of such a vicious crime. Under duress and coercion, the boys, unfortunately, confessed. However, before the trial, the FBI tested the DNA of the rape kit and found it did not match any of the tested suspects. Nevertheless, the boys were tried, convicted, and spent between 6 and 13 years in prison. They were innocent. Yet, they were caught in the inequity and injustice of our legal system.

Perhaps it is apropos that this day marks thirty years from such a vicious crime and the equally atrocious miscarriage of justice. Debra noted in her sermon on Palm Sunday that we humans can be quite fickle, alluding to the quick shift of the crowds in support of Jesus on Palm Sunday to their cries to, "Crucify him!" on Good Friday. We also can be cruel and vicious, particularly to those who are innocent. And Jesus was innocent. He became the scapegoat for the religious leaders who were troubled by his challenge to their authority. He became the scapegoat for the political leaders like Pilate who were given an easy way to calm the restless crowds by swapping in Jesus for Barabbas and making a spectacle for all to see of what happens when you challenge Roman empirical power. He even became the scapegoat for his friends who all abandoned him--save Mary Magdalene and his mother--and walked away or downright denied ever knowing Jesus.

Thus, we are prudent to consider the ways that we also continue to make a scapegoat of Jesus. Is our very understanding of the cross and Jesus' crucifixion yet one more example of how we turn the innocent into a victim to explain away what we think God is up to in this act? The language of the Church down through the centuries betrays this. We talk about the cross as an instrument of divine justice. God's ultimate demand of punishment for our sins. And one person must bear the sins of everyone. Yet, this paradigm only perpetuates the ongoing injustice that has continued down through the centuries. While Jesus may be seen as dying once for all for the sins of all, the very system that he is caught up in--sacrificial and scapegoating--continues to produce one scapegoat after another. Crushing the innocence of our humanity in every generation.

Yet, as David Lose notes, if we take seriously the countless stories from the gospels about Jesus and, more importantly, *Jesus' words about God and God's kingdom, then we might grow more accustomed to God doing the unexpected. God just forgiving us out of love rather than demanding satisfaction first. God acting more like a desperate parent than an angry monarch. God reaching out again and again in love and mercy rather than exacting retribution.*

Which is a critical shift in how we see the cross. It is crucial for us to use the lens of love rather than retribution, forgiveness rather than satisfaction, mercy rather than punishment, when we consider this event. If the very crux of our religious belief centers around punishment for satisfaction, then how easily is it for us to perpetuate that model in our dealings, our relationships, and certainly within our society. Professor James Cone notes this and the connection between systemic racism and its brutality and the Cross of Jesus in his work, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Furthermore, it is no wonder that the Central Park Five were treated the way that they were. Indeed, one could argue that they were simply victims of the same system that picked up Jesus and crushed his life as well.

Thus, the call to us in this time, on this Good Friday, on the 30th anniversary of the Central Park Five, is to see in the crucifixion not the appeasement of God by the innocent suffering of Jesus. Rather, this moment is an opportunity to see in the suffering of Jesus the fullest embodiment of God's love and solidarity for and with us. God loving so fully and profoundly that God would be willing to enter into the place of ultimate despair. God loving so fully and profoundly that there is no place that God is not. God loving so fully and profoundly that it is no coincidence regarding what happens to Jesus. As Richard Rohr notes, "There is no such thing as redemptive violence. Violence doesn't save; it only destroys—in both short and long term. Jesus replaced the myth of redemptive violence with the truth of redemptive suffering. He showed us on the cross how to hold the pain and let it transform us, rather than pass it on to others around us." We, too, are invited into this engagement with the world. We are invited to step away from a world without a scapegoat and the violence that goes with it, and instead step toward a world where we recognize God's love for us and for the world so that we can offer ourselves for the same.