

On Good Friday, the sermon frequently reflects on the suffering of Christ. It considers the unfair and torturous death, the irrationality of the sentence of crucifixion, the meanness of the Jewish authorities and the spineless nature of the Roman governor and asks the congregation to contemplate the horror of Good Friday. This is not necessarily a bad approach. Certainly it is a traditional approach to Good Friday. Usually, when I preach this way, I end the sermon by pointing out that, as much as we would like to transfer the blame for Good Friday to the Jews or the Romans of old, we cannot do that. Our sin, as much as any sin of any time, carries with it the responsibility for Good Friday. Else, Jesus did not die for our sins and we are not a redeemed people.

There is certainly not anything wrong with this approach. The points are true and they are bold. Crucifixion, of all means of execution, is the most heinous of capital methods. I think that when we are forced to consider the suffering and pain, it helps us to understand the love that bore that pain. And, when we shift that contemplation to personal accountability, by my insisting that we acknowledge our own responsibility for our Lord's death, we understand, perhaps for the first time, that God himself pays a price for our sins. The grace of reconciliation is not cheap grace. The grace of reconciliation was paid with the blood of Jesus. Our salvation was purchased at a most dear price - the price of Jesus' death on Calvary's hill. Good Friday is God's most precious gift to us. We must never take it lightly.

Why, we ask, did there have to be a Good Friday? The answer is that Good Friday is the ultimate and even logical outcome of willful human disobedience to God, the culmination of corruption, wantonness and evil intent that leads to the supreme, even the archetypal act of sin. That supreme and archetypal product of sin is the very death of good, and it is humanity, the high point of Creation, that killed ultimate and perfect good. In the face of human wretchedness God the Son died. If we leave it there, hope also dies.

But, my brothers and sisters in Christ, because of Easter, hope did not die. God's love triumphed and continues to triumph which each new day and each new birth. God's love overcame death and the grave, and we, as a redeemed Christian people, live beyond death and the grave. We find the grace of Good Friday in the Risen Son of Easter Day. The empty tomb becomes for us our souls' emptiness of sin. Christ's triumph is our triumph if we accept him as our Lord and our Savior. Christ's death becomes Christ's victory, for in his death he achieved his purpose. Love incarnate gave himself as our sacrifice, and through that sacrifice we are set free. *Amen.*