

Good Friday
"Behold"
John 19:17-30

"So they took Jesus, 17 and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. 19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. 21 So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, 24 so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things, 25 but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. 28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

Brothers and sisters,

Calling this Good Friday seems especially anachronistic in these times. There is nothing good about what happens in these readings, there is nothing good about what's going on, but here we are. God's genius, as I have said before, is pulling good out of bad, and we surely need a healthy dose of this now and into the hereafter. What Good Friday is so good at – pardon the pun – is reminding us of this.

Jesus here is crucified, and in the midst of this crucifixion our Lord takes time out of His dying (and dying is a busy thing) to take care of His mother. I'm going to remark on this somewhat quickly and move to what it shows us. That is what Jesus is doing. He is ensuring that His mother has a means

of getting financial and emotional support, and so Jesus turns to John. John is thought to be quite young by our reckoning when He is following Jesus, perhaps the youngest of the twelve. We're not sure, but He might've been as young as fifteen or sixteen, so he's strong and he's got enough life left in him to make sure Jesus' mother is taken care of until her own passing. Jesus passes on the responsibility of supporting His mom to John, and then He gives that incredible declaration: It is finished. Sometimes, the most weighty things don't need speeches, and this is a perfect example of this. With a few short sentences, all is done.

We are plagued with loneliness in this time of isolation, and it is worth mentioning to you that Jesus is experiencing a kind of loneliness that defies description. Yes, Mary is there. Yes, John is even there. Yes, the crowds and the soldiers are there, but loneliness, as you know well, is not simply the absence of other people. It is quite possible to be lonely in a crowd, in fact, that can be lonelier than the alternative. Remember that most of the folks watching Jesus are watching Him with that oh-so-hard-to-understand callousness of the ancient world. Watching criminals die as spectator sport makes our stomachs turn, but this was very much something they did back then.

No, Jesus' loneliness is the loneliness of holiness burdened with sin. What do I mean by that? Jesus was the only sinless man, Jesus was God, yet Jesus on the cross has taken all sin, everything evil that mankind has ever done or mustered or thought. When Jesus screams out to God that He has been forsaken, He is not putting on a show. God has turned away from Jesus so completely that the sun itself follows suit and goes dark. God, our holy, just, eternal God, cannot bear to even look at His own Son because His Son has become everything foul on this earth. Jesus is sinless, yet Jesus has had sin dumped into His lap, onto His shoulders, and the punishment for that sin as well. God pours it out on Him. Our sin.

That is lonely. I want you to remember this. God knows loneliness. Jesus knows isolation. He

knows what it is like to be trapped by sin, with no good way out of it. He trapped Himself in our sin to save us, and that knowledge of purpose did not make the burden any easier. Sometimes, all we want is for God to explain Himself, so we can understand why He does the things He does, but even when He does, it doesn't always make it easier. Sometimes, it all comes to what God is willing to push on us. I call on you to remember whatever God has placed on our shoulders, He has taken on His own. Whatever He puts on us, He has taken so much more in this very moment. Jesus isn't a bystander, He's a Savior who has been there and done that in so many more ways than we can understand. He knows us, and He knows our burdens.

But look what He does in that moment. Jesus screams in despair in other Gospels. Jesus is in every kind of pain imaginable, and I'm sure He gives voice to it. He thirsts. But look what He does *here*. He gives, and He does it twice. He helps. He reaches out in compassion. He's dying by inches but He still musters this. It is amazing! He doesn't call for the death of those murdering Him. He doesn't try to defend Himself. He doesn't yell at you for the sins that are hurting Him so much. He doesn't hate you for making Him go through this. He takes care of mom, gives John a task, and then He gives up His spirit.

Among many other things, this is what is so hard to believe about God. It is hard to wrap your head around that kind of strength, but more to the point it is hard to wrap your head around that kind of total, wholesale commitment to the good. We're flawed creatures and how we see things is equally flawed. Jesus is not. He is razor-focused on saving as many as He can and doing good, even to the children that reject Him, spit on Him, and demand crazy things from Him. He begs forgiveness for His executioners, yeah, but He also, in the midst of that execution, seeks good for those He cares about. That shows you the true alien wonderousness of God.

The principle is something God shows over and over. Instead of getting rid of evil, He works

good out of evil, and that is the principle I want you to fix your eyes on in these days. We would rather God do both, and someday indeed God will get rid of evil for good. But for now, on this earth, in these last days, God continues to do what He did on the cross: To make evil work out for the good of His children. Whether it be murder, war, plague, or imprisonment, evil is what it is, and God condemns it, but He makes good come of it. From this murder came our salvation. Something good will come out of the many evils of our time. Believe it. Look at that cross and believe it, brothers and sisters, because this is God's masterwork. It's unsettling to be in the midst of it as we are, but we trust the God that was crucified, precisely because He was crucified and in that crucifixion is our salvation.

I'm sure Mary thought it was over, that the nightmare had just begun, that she would forever be condemned to a life of indigence and grief. The disciples certainly thought it was done, the Jesus thing had run its course, that is why they all ran. I don't think you folk are necessarily in the same position unless you're overreacting, but I'm pointing you to these examples because these were people that were watching their God bleed and die. Mary was watching her baby boy breathe his last. Yet God worked not just good out of it, He worked joy, life everlasting, and a future free from fear from all of it. And He worked it for you and for me. We may be trapped. We may be adrift. We may be far from home. But God came to make Himself ours and ours together and that lasts forever.

Amen.