

Good Friday, Year C
4-2-10
All Saints

Who named this Friday "Good" in the first place?

There are four accounts of this day in the Bible - four. And they all agree on some things: Jesus died on a cross between two other men at a place named Golgotha. He was hung there as a result of a charge of treason against the Empire. He had a sign above his head that read, "King of the Jews." He died just before sundown on the day before the Sabbath.

But that's it for similarity. The skeleton of the story is the same but the bones are en fleshed in different ways by the different gospel writers. Mark's story is almost the same as Matthew's. Their Jesus has been so ill-treated by his captors that he can't carry the cross by himself - someone else has to help him. Once he is on the cross, the only sound he makes is a loud cry bewailing his feelings of desertion and loneliness.

Luke, which we heard last week, gives Jesus more to say. His Jesus forgives those who were against him. His Jesus has a conversation with the men dying on either side of him. His Jesus does not feel abandoned; instead, Jesus commits his spirit to God. Luke's Jesus is gentle.

But in John's gospel, the one we have just read, Jesus is not broken and he is not gentle. He is large and in charge all the way through. He doesn't need someone to carry his cross for him. No one in John's gospel mocks him while he hangs on it. In fact, he is so in charge, even to the end, that he makes arrangements from the cross for his mother's care - telling the beloved disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And when he dies, it is God who is on the cross, saying, "It is finished."

The four gospel writers are like people who have all just seen the same event happening on the street but when each of them tells his or her version of what happened, they are surprisingly different. It's sometimes hard to believe it was

the same event. But just because the accounts are different does not mean that they are not true! The message here is that there is more than one way to interpret what happened on the cross, and all of those ways are right!

That is the mystery of this faith of ours. There is no one correct account of the events of the day. There is no one correct way to interpret the events of the day. There is no one correct answer to questions that arise from this day.

Did God allow Jesus to suffer? Did God not only allow it, but will it to happen as well? What kind of Father does that to a son? Did God require Jesus to die to pay off a debt to Godself? Where was God at the end?

I don't know ONE answer to any of these questions.

I THINK that God did not intend or allow or will Jesus to suffer. I THINK that it was the will of those who had been confronted by Jesus in his quest to turn things inside out and upside down - the will of those people who had been confronted for Jesus to suffer.

I THINK that what God intended for Jesus was for him to live his length of days, full of love for his brothers and sisters, doing works of justice and mercy, teaching those who would follow him, and healing those who came to him for help -- in short, all the things that made him Jesus, that made him the person he was born to be. But when the world rejected Jesus, when the world said no to the justice and mercy that Jesus offered, that didn't mean that Jesus could stop being Jesus. God's will was for Jesus to be totally himself even if that meant his life would be shorter; God supported him to go on offering the justice and mercy and love of God's kingdom, even when he was faced with those who wanted to kill him.

God also intends for us to be fully who we have been created to be in the same way that Jesus was fully who he was created to be. It is our knowing that God's will is to support us in being who we are, to be with us always, that enables us to go forward. And who are we to be? We are to be the body of Christ in the world

today. We are to do works of justice and mercy. We are to love our sister and our brother, to bring in God's kingdom, where the last are first, where the lost are found, where empire is sent away empty and where the lowly are lifted up. It may mean we are scorned by others, it may mean we are rejected, it may even mean that our length of days will be shorter than it might have been otherwise.

Why is that "Good" for us any more than it was "Good" for Jesus?

Barbara Brown Taylor writes:

Today, on the quietest day of the year, we have come to sit in the presence of one who was fully who God created him to be every day of his life—who loved God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength, and with all his mind—and who loved his friends so much that he stepped into the oncoming traffic of death in order to push them out of the way. He furthermore did it all with no more than the basic human equipment—a beating heart, two good hands, a holy vision, and some companions who could see it too—thereby showing the rest of us humans that such a life is not beyond our reach. Whatever else happens on Sunday, here is enough reason to call this Friday Good. Amen.