

“Atonement”

John 18:1-19:42

Good Friday, April 14, 2006

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John 19:25b-30

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' ²⁹A 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. ³⁰When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Prayer.

It is nearly unfathomable to me how any serious Christian can bring themselves to Good Friday, experience the Passion of Jesus Christ, and still come away without a gracious, benevolent understanding of God. How is it possible to hear and experience the death of Jesus, and not be moved by this amazing gift of God's love and grace?

It shows how deeply we long for a punitive, authoritarian God; a God who can damn our enemies and selectively save His chosen, namely, my loved ones and I.

Yet, as is quite often the case, the God is get isn't the God we've gone looking for.

John can not be more explicitly clear, when he narrates the dialogue between Jesus and Nichodemus, "For God so loved the world," he tells him, "that he gave his only beloved Son, that whosoever believes in him will not perish but will have everlasting life." (John 3:16) God's motive is love. That's what made Jesus go through with his arrest, passion, and crucifixion. Love drove him to, and kept him on, the cross.

Oh, but you and I long for a world where there is a reward for hard work. We don't like the thought that God – or anyone for that matter – gives something for nothing, something to someone who is lazy or undeserving. We don't like sandbaggers, slackers, or parasites. We lift high a self-made man, an industrious entrepreneur, an assertive, aggressive, passion driven leader.

Yet, on the cross is One who has become the complete opposite of what we esteem or seek. On the cross is Jesus, who completely denies himself, is made completely empty, is making the most complete and perfect example of the powerless of this world. They beat him, scourge him, break a reed over his head, push thorns into his brow, and pound nails through his hands and feet – all the while, without putting up a fight. You can't get any more helpless than that.

On the cross is the One who forces us to move beyond the black and white of this world. Love triumphs over sin. Grace trumps the penalty of being found guilty under the Law. The new Adam, takes upon himself the sins of the world, and like a sheep led to slaughter, he atones for our sins, giving his life that we might live.

Take a look around, friends. Take a good look at this world, and how we mess it up ... with our pride and arrogance, with our ego and greed. For all the chest beating and proclamations about being a nation of righteousness and morality, Bible and family values ... yet, we roll like pigs in the mud of sin and vice, addictions and violence, discrimination and injustice. We joke about how we dislike lawyers, yet, consider how quick we are to turn to lawyers to solve our problems, our disputes, our broken marriages, our custody spats ... just when did we stop turning to God?

We do like to add to Jesus' burden, don't we? Perhaps we can add more weight to his pierced agony.

We drag ourselves to this Good Friday Passion each year knowing in our heart of hearts that when we are in charge, when we are in command, when we are in the drivers seat of life ... we allow ourselves to get sucked down the drain headed straight for hell.

We know our world needs to be changed. We know it is up to us ... it is up to us to become the change we seek.

Our only hope, our only salvation, is when we can hand it over, give it up, give it all away and allow Jesus to have complete control of our lives. Our only prayer is to lose the self, to allow God to become the center and the sovereign of our lives, to pick up our cross like Jesus, and to follow him.

The only road that goes to heaven is the one that takes us with Christ through the valley of death. It isn't a road that anyone of us would willingly choose. Yet it is the road He has chosen for us, on our behalf, because he loves us.

This evening we travel the road with Christ to his death. We die a little bit ourselves. We burden him with our sins and we discover his Atonement is complete. We die this evening when we are faithful to Christ and allow him to be our Redeemer and our Savior.

The love of God brings us to death. And it is this same love that will give us life.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.