

Good Friday Sermon Notes
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Why is today called *Good* Friday? I've wondered about that – maybe you have too. I've heard explanations, and thought of explanations – and even preached a few. I hear what preachers have said, and I think I get it, I think I've figured it out. And then, the question comes back, nagging.

Good Friday. Maybe “Frightful Friday” or “Foul Friday.” Or, better, “Bloody Friday” or “Violent Friday.” Or even, “God-abuse Friday.” But GOOD? I don't think so, at least not based on the scripture we hear today.

You may have hear preachers tell you that today is “good” because God required sacrifice, blood to be shed, payment to be made for a debt of our sin. God is angry, God must punish someone, so God substitutes God's son for us.

You may have heard preachers say that God *wants* this torture. It is the only way the sin-score will be settled. Blood, violence, death – the only way we will be saved. This is what God demands.

You may have heard preachers say that.

Well – they are wrong. They are terribly wrong. At least for me. That message is not good news. That doesn't make today good. Not for me. I don't want a God who demands blood, who requires violence, who will allow, willingly and purposely, the abuse of God's own Son. I don't want that God.

It seems to me that all the theories preachers (and all of us) spin about the violence of the Cross are *excuses*. They get *us* off the hook. They excuse our behavior. If blood and violence and death are good for God, sanctioned by God (we say), then they are OK for us too.

Keep on fighting, keep on killing, keep on shedding blood. It happened to Jesus – so we can keep on doing it too, often in Jesus' name.

Something else must be going on here before this day can be called GOOD.

Last Sunday, in the midst of the dramatic reading of the Passion narrative, we heard a reference to the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac. You know how it goes – God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, on whom Abraham depends for descendents, children and grandchildren. Abraham obeys. He goes out into the wilderness, builds the altar and fire, binds Isaac, and lifts his knife to kill his son. But – at the last minute – God intervenes. There is a ram, caught in the thicket. God tells

Abraham to kill the ram instead of Isaac and he does. All is well. A test of faith perhaps (although still an unnerving story at best).

All week I have been thinking about that Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac, the close call of Isaac's sacrifice by his father. And I have been thinking of a poem by Wilfred Owen, an English poet killed in the horror, the trenches of World War I. Let me read it to you:

*So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac, the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! An angel called him out of heav'n,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son, --
And half the seed of Europe, one by one....*

Half the seed of Europe, one by one.... Half the seed of Africa, Darfur;
Of Iraq, of Baghdad. Of Afghanistan. Of Palestine, and Israel and Jerusalem.
Of America –
4000 killed in Iraq
One out of every 100 Americans in prison.

Half the seed – one by one....

Jesus' on the Cross, Jesus' sacrifice does not tell about God. Rather it tells us about ourselves – our true nature.
Jesus on the Cross is a mirror of who we are, killing our sons and daughters, killing the world, one by one....

Jesus died for our sins we say. OUR sins – each of us. No one is innocent here, no not one, except for Jesus himself. The violence, blood, anger, fear, aggression, suffering – are all OURS. All ours – our sin.

Frightful Friday, Bloody Friday, to be sure – and the blood, fright, violence, sin – against others, our selves, the earth itself – are all OURS.

All ours – because we refuse to sacrifice the “Ram of Pride.” We refuse to sacrifice the Ram of pride, and hatred and selfishness, the ram of sin.

We could do it – we could, but we will not. We will not offer up the violence of our sin. We will not sacrifice our sin to God, we will not repent and embrace God with our whole heart and soul and mind. We will not offer up our self-centeredness, our pride, our selfishness, our anger, our fear, our hate. We won't change, we won't turn and repent. And on the Cross, we see the consequences of who we really are. Jesus shows our true nature – to us and to God.

We won't accept God's grace and love which God offers.
We won't make the sacrifice – and we see the consequences of our actions on the Cross.

So—why IS today called Good?

Only by hope. Only by trust. We hear Jesus' words "Father, forgive them." We hope Jesus' words are true, and not an empty prayer. We trust that the mystery of this moment, this death does, in fact, fulfill the words of promise, the words of the prophets. We trust that somehow Jesus' suffering IS for us and will make us whole.

How? We don't know. But we trust that God is with us, as God is with Jesus on the Cross. We trust that in the mystery of Jesus' death, in the mystery of God's love, in the mystery of the Cross, we will see our sin – and find God there. We will see our violence, our anger, our hate – and find God there. We will see our destruction of our relationships with our families, our communities, our world itself – that we will see it for what it is – and find God there!

We will see and turn and find God – and be renewed, recreated, forgiven. We will become the people God has created us to be. We will find that God does not leave us, God suffers with us, God loves us and forgives us. We will find that we are recreated in God's Love.

That – if that happens, when that happens, will truly make this day GOOD.
Until then, however,

We wait in shadows, we trust and hope in darkness, and we watch Jesus die on the Cross.