

THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

REFLECTIONS ON GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 2021



The New Testament has many different metaphors to discuss sin, grace, and salvation. There are many ways of thinking about why Jesus died as we reflect, pray, and worship on Good Friday. Today we share four metaphors, four ways of thinking about Jesus's death.

You may want to find an image of Jesus on the cross that means something to you, or play some music that companions you in your reflections and prayer.

As you settle in, take a deep breath. Incline toward the Spirit of God, in and around you, as you come near Jesus in his death.

**“DESPISED AND REJECTED,
A MAN OF SORROWS AND ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF.”**

The prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53:3)

Jesus suffered and died to show us where to find God. In Jesus, we see a human of sorrows and a crucified God. So Jesus shows us where God is: present with all who suffer, in solidarity with oppression, injustice, pain, and loss. As Howard Thurman wrote, Jesus is with those who have “their backs against the wall.” Jesus died on a particular Roman cross. And in some sense, Jesus died on every cross. Jesus hung on every lynching tree. Jesus sits in every prison cell. Jesus has been struck by every bullet, every bomb. Jesus has been ill in every sickness. There is no suffering where Jesus is not.

Response

What suffering on the earth causes you most pain or anger this year? Gaze at an image of Jesus on the cross, and ask Jesus for faith to know Jesus is present in all suffering. What is your greatest personal pain? Ask God to help you know how Spirit of Christ is with you there.

“GO AND LEARN WHAT THIS MEANS: ‘I DESIRE MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE.’”

Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 9:13)

REFLECTION

Jesus died because we killed him. People have always been threatened by those that don't live conventionally, who speak the truth, and love radically; and resist unjust power. Jesus was an innocent victim, killed because human societies have been killing innocent victims since the dawn of history. As a sacrificial lamb, though, Jesus invites us to stop complicity in any scapegoating, blaming, or stigmatizing of any person or group.

Response

Who do we blame for our troubles? Can we release them from blame and let Jesus bear the blame instead? As we look within today, rather than focusing on others, what do we see that needs Jesus' healing attention?

“HE IS THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD.”

Paul the Apostle (Colossians 1:15)

Jesus died to show us what God is like. Actually, Jesus lived to show us what God is like as well. In Jesus' wise words and teaching, we hear the eternal wisdom - the *sophia* - of God. In Jesus' ministry of loving touch and inclusion, of healing and truth telling, we witness the ways of God. In Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God, of the Beloved Community, we see the vision of God. And in Jesus' proclamation of forgiveness - go in peace, child; your sins are forgiven - we learn that God has always loved to forgive. As Jesus died, saying: Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing, we see the self-giving, radically forgiving, co-suffering love of God.

Response

What sin--old or new, personal or collective, harm done or good undone--do you have to confess to God today, knowing you are accepted, forgiven, and empowered to be made new? When you picture Jesus forgiving his enemies while hanging naked on the cross, what about God do you see?

“JESUS BECAME WHAT WE ARE THAT WE MIGHT BECOME WHAT HE IS.”

Athanasius, third century A.D.

God became like us, so that we could become like God. This was the belief of the founding fathers and mothers of the faith. God has become fully incarnate in the life of a human being, and has joined all of God's life to all of our death, so that we can become heirs of all God has in Christ and be transformed from glory to glory. This is cosmic and historic: God has brought all the limits and sins and mortality of humanity into God's nature. And God has brought the boundless love and life and immortality that is God's into our natures. And it is persuasive: as friends of Jesus, we are invited to love as God loves, and to let that change us, to make us more and more like God.

Response

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is around you and within you right now. As you breathe, welcome God's presence to fill all your body, all your thoughts and memories and intentions. Thank God for welcoming all of you into the life and body of God as well.