

Good Friday
March 30, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

John 19:17-30 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). **18** There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. **20** Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. **21** The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”

22 Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

24 “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.”

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

“They divided my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.”

So this is what the soldiers did.

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. **26** When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” **27** and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” **29** A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. **30** When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

“The Perspective Makes It Good”

Perspective makes all the difference. My perspective has changed on the price of gas. I used to complain about how expensive gas was. Then when I moved to New Mexico and realized how many people I personally knew had jobs connected to the price of oil and gas, I cringed when the price dropped by 20 cents. Perspective makes all the difference. Most of us probably don’t pay much attention when the Federal Reserve boosts interest rates by 1/4 of 1% or when the stock market drops 100 points. We do however notice how hard it is to get a job when the unemployment rate is really high. Or, if you are in charge of hiring qualified employees in your company, you get frustrated when the unemployment rate drops and it seems impossible to fill job openings with qualified candidates. Enjoy school vacations? Depends on whether you’re looking for short term child care or activities to keep kiddos busy or whether you’re a teacher doing a little happy dance.

Good Friday takes on very different meanings depending on the perspective from which you view it. Let's start with Pilate. He has a delicate balancing act. He has to remind the leaders of this conquered nation that he is the one who is ultimately in charge. And yet he has to be careful that some little misstep insulting their precious religious traditions won't set off a riot, demonstrations, or even a revolt. He wants nothing to do with religious squabbling among the people he is trying to rule. Of course he has a sense of justice. But advocating for the innocence of this Jesus might push the religious leaders over the edge. He is happy just to be done with this whole ordeal. He caves in to their demands and agrees to have Jesus crucified. Even giving in to them, he gets in one last jab with the notice fastened above the cross of Jesus: **"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."** (John 19:19) The chief priests want it changed. But that was the charge they leveled against Jesus. That's what they kept coming back to when Pilate tried to release this peaceful loser. For Pilate, it's all good if this satisfies the Jewish ruling council quiet and calms the pilgrims in town for the Passover festival.

The Jewish religious leaders view Jesus as a problem. They just need to properly dispose of him. They long ago decided Jesus was a threat. We might never know if they felt legitimately concerned about the welfare of the people or whether they were just trying to protect their own power and influence. Already after Jesus brought Lazarus back to life, they had decided Jesus' fate. Caiaphas the high priest lectured his colleagues: **"You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."** (John 11:50) Whether their motives were selfish or pure, they knew Jerusalem was a powder keg and they didn't want Jesus to be the match that blew everything to smithereens. So they manipulated Pilate into doing their bidding. They used every advantage they had to expose his vulnerabilities so he would do their dirty work for them. It wasn't a good situation, but the best possible outcome of a whole bunch of undesirable possibilities.

Four Roman soldiers are assigned to each crucifixion victim. They are just doing their jobs. They are carrying out a gruesome duty. No potential perks were going to be passed up. To them Jesus was just a victim easily exploited.

And then we get Mary, the mother of Jesus, and John, his beloved disciple. Like so much about the Bible's account of the crucifixion, it is reported as simple fact without emotional embellishment: **"Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby."** (John 19:26) Apparently none of the other apostles were brave enough to show their faces at the crucifixion. So John is faced with the grim horror of witnessing the shameful, tragic end of his beloved teacher and master. And Mary. What terrible agony is gripping her heart as she witnesses the brutality inflicted on her son! She had no idea this is how Simeon's prophecy all those years ago would come true: **"And a sword will pierce your own soul too."** (Luke 2:35) Two of the people who care most deeply for Jesus get a front row seat for his excruciating ordeal. From their perspective, this day is tortuous heartbreak.

For centuries, some of the best artists have portrayed the crucifixion scene. They each come at this episode from a unique perspective. Some of the earliest were basically graffiti ridiculing Christians for their loser God who died such a horrible death. But even the

memorable artworks by Christians can sometimes become manipulative. Some portray the realistic gruesomeness of the scene just trying to give an accurate glimpse into something reported in almost clinical terms in the Scriptures. Others are doing their best to bring feelings of guilt and shame from anyone who sees the paintings.

One of the most memorable images I've seen is also one of the simplest. Rembrandt van Rijn produced an etching entitled "The Three Crosses" in the middle of the 1600s. It's a simple black and white etching. The Roman soldiers are there. So are Mary and John. People in the crowd blend one into the other, helping to keep the focus on Jesus in his last moments of life. But there is one figure who stands out. The artist puts himself in the work.

And that makes me wonder, what is my perspective on the crucifixion? Do I give in to the impulse to somehow downplay the seriousness of that event? Should I convince myself that I didn't really need Jesus to do that for me? I like Jesus. I even need Jesus. I appreciate his help. He can show a great example of putting others first and offering whole-hearted obedience to God. He can become a great teacher and life transformer. Have I become so familiar with these events that I just greet them with a shrug? Have I heard this account so often that I've become numb to the seriousness of what happened outside Jerusalem 2,000 years ago?

Like Rembrandt, I am there near the cross. And so are you. We are there in our little imperfections we are conscious of every day. We are there in the things we label as personality flaws we just learn to deal there. We are there in every way we fail God in big ways and small ways. We are there because we are the ones who put Jesus on that cross. For every thoughtless word, for every broken promise, for every greedy grasp and selfish action, placing yourself before others and placing other things before God. For all of this, Jesus places himself here, tonight, before you.

My perspective on the crucifixion depends on how I see myself and Jesus. And maybe that's really where we need to turn. How does Jesus see this crucifixion? How does he understand everything he went through? See, so often we see Jesus as this helpless victim who was powerless to do anything to put a stop to the evil being carried out by Jewish leaders through their Roman pawns. Yet, that's not what we see in John's portrait of Jesus.

God is in control. When Pilate posts the notice above the cross of Jesus, he is accidentally proclaiming the truth. He actually is the King of the Jews, even if rejected by his subjects. Scheming Sanhedrin leaders are stifled in their attempts to rob sympathy for Jesus from the crowds when Pilate finally puts his foot down: **"What I have written, I have written."** (John 19:22) When the soldiers gamble for Jesus' clothes, they fulfill Scripture. Hanging between two criminals brought out Isaiah's vivid prophecy of the Messiah (Isaiah 53:12). It's not just attention to detail. In the depths of deep despair, Jesus has the presence of mind to appoint a caretaker for his mother. But there is something more going on than those practical concerns. Even in agony, Jesus forgets himself and sees only the needs of humanity. He sees you. And he sees me.

Amazingly, we see no anger from Jesus. No desires for vengeance escape his lips. He calls down no brimstone judgments against his persecutors, executioners, or accusers. In fact

when Jesus utters **“I am thirsty,”** he is showing he is still in control of his senses. (John 19:28) He needs the drink to wet his lips enough to make the necessary, final pronouncement.

Jesus sees everything he has done and knows the keystone has been placed in the arch. Everything that has happened to him allows him to put the final piece into the puzzle. His blood has been shed to pay the price to rescue humanity. For three hours he has felt the oppressive load of guilt incurred by every person in human history. He has suffered abandonment by the Father, even though he is the only innocent individual throughout all time. He has taken the place of every sinner under God’s righteous wrath. His suffering has accomplished the reconciliation between God and people. Jesus has completed everything God commissioned him to do. His work is done.

His final words aren’t uttered out in a whimper. **“It is finished”** is a pronouncement of victory. (John 19:30) His head isn’t hung in shameful weakness, but in acknowledgment that his entire purpose for coming to earth has been brought to its goal.

What if we could see the world from God’s perspective? What if we could see ourselves the way Jesus sees us?

Jesus wants you to see He knew exactly what He was doing. And he was doing it for you. Jesus endured the most severe anguish and sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane, so you can enjoy joy with your Savior. Jesus was betrayed with a kiss by one of his closest friends, so you know your God will never turn his back on you. He was wrongly accused by false witnesses, so you will never have to fear Satan’s allegations before your heavenly Father. He was condemned by a rigged court so you can enjoy God’s not guilty verdict. He was stripped of his garments so you can be robed with his righteousness. A crown of thorns was pressed onto his head so he can heal the sting of sin on your own heart. He carried his own cross to the place of execution so you will never have to shoulder the impossible burden of accomplishing your own salvation. He faced dire thirst and deprivation on the cross so you can have your soul quenched by his forgiveness. He was condemned as a dangerous criminal so you can be freed from the sins and trespasses and iniquities you have committed against your God. He absorbed the guilt of all of sinful humanity, endured the punishment we all deserve so you can enjoy freedom from condemnation before your holy God. He was beaten, whipped, and mocked so you will be spared of the abuse of Satan in torment. He willingly welcomed death so you will live forever in the joys of heaven. He hung his head in death so you can lift up your eyes to greet your Lord and Savior for all eternity. He wrung out the very last tears of pain and anguish on the cross so he can wipe away every tear from your eyes in heaven. He endured the scoffing and ridicule of evil crowds so you will be welcomed into heavenly glory with the shouts and songs of angels.

And it is from this perspective we can proudly praise Jesus for the crucifixion. We can claim him as our crucified Savior. We can consider the most tragic injustice in history as our badge of honor. From this perspective we can call today good. Jesus makes it Good Friday. Amen.