

Why Is Friday “Good”?

Isaiah 53:4-7, Matthew 27:32-56

We're there, at our long distance, watching the events of Jesus' suffering and death with the women mentioned in Matthew 27. Why is this day called “Good Friday”? We can learn much from the prophet Isaiah who proclaimed Christ Jesus from a long distance, hundreds of years before the events.

The prophet Isaiah says of his beloved anointed one:

- 4 It was certainly our sickness that he carried,
and our sufferings that he bore,
but we thought him afflicted,
struck down by God and tormented.
- 5 He was pierced because of our rebellions
and crushed because of our crimes.
He bore the punishment that made us whole;
by his wounds we are healed.
- 6 Like sheep we had all wandered away,
each going its own way,
but the Lord let fall on him all our crimes.
- 7 He was oppressed and tormented,
but didn't open his mouth.
Like a lamb being brought to slaughter,
he didn't open his mouth.

This is how the Prophet Isaiah wrote of the events we hear of today. He wrote a long time before Jesus, and a long, long time before today. What does it all mean?

Well, let me start with Jesus' cry from the cross that we just heard in our reading. Matthew says, “At about three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’).”

Why are you so far from me? We feel these words in our isolation. We perhaps know something of the pain of separation. What Jesus' knew was the isolation he willingly took for us, the isolation of being separated from his Father as he slowly died on the cross. Jesus took a punishment, sentence of death on his body as the price which must be paid for sin... separation from God... death. The truth is that we deserve that punishment. But in our struggle, in our lament, in our sin, Jesus does not leave or abandon us. Instead, God takes on his body the punishment we deserve.

This is the Lamb of God that Isaiah wrote about many years before.

I have here a cutting of with thorns. It's sharp. As I make it dig in to my skin, it hurts. I don't push it much; but the thorn is sharp and it hurts. The thorn is a reminder of the pain that Jesus suffered as he was abandoned by his disciples. The pain that the Lamb of God took on his body with lashes of the whip, with the crown made of thorns, and the nails of the cross. And ultimately, the pain of separation from his Father for us. Jesus cried out, why are you so far from me my God? And in so doing, willingly took the punishment for sin for us, so that we might be forgiven, that we by his

wounds might be healed. The prick of sin is death, and yes, this is an uncomfortable truth as we stand at the cross. But there is more to this Friday that we call "Good." The Lamb of God in his willing sacrifice for you and for me *takes away* the sin of the world and in so doing *rescues* us from the punishment of eternal death and separation from God.

As I hold the thorns, I also have a small piece of lambskin. I wrap it around the thorns. Now my fingers, my flesh are now protected and saved from the prick of the thorns. The lamb takes the sting of the thorn and its pain for me. By the presence of the Lamb we are rescued.

As I hold this lambskin around the thorn, and as you hear of the sacrificial lamb on the cross for you, know that this is Good Friday. We may be physically isolated from others whom we love. But God so loves us that Jesus came among us, and came *for* us, and stayed with us to save us. By his wounds we are healed, and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Video of this Good Friday service including the above sermon: <https://youtu.be/-EJkTQz3C2E>