

### “What’s so Good about Good Friday?”

Years ago I worked for a consulting firm that was decidedly secular in its practices. Yet each year we were all given the day off for Good Friday. The rationale was that it was “a good Friday to take off”. So Christians, atheist, Jews, and agnostics took off Good Friday and used it as they saw fit.

The question often arises what is so good about Good Friday? After all, this is the day of our Savior’s crucifixion and death. What could be good about murder, even if it was the work of the political system against a perceived threat? Why would we celebrate the execution of a man, especially a man that we know did nothing to harm anyone? Indeed, he was a man who healed people and taught them to love one another, a man who taught them about God’s love and the coming Kingdom of God that would bring equality and love to everyone.

Of course, there is nothing good about that. We have to look at the older meaning of good to realize that in this situation what our ancestors were talking about was piety and holiness. Thus, we can substitute holy for good and perhaps Holy Friday makes more sense.

However, event that begs the question “what is so holy about this day.” Once again we note that it is the day of Jesus’ death. It is not a happy day in the way that most of our holy days are. It is the day of his brutal execution for the crime of teaching people to love one another. A crime that brought him many followers. So many followers that the religious authorities were frightened that they might get out of hand and become a threat to their power and prestige.

What do we do with this kind of holy day? We do not want to reenact the trial, flogging and crucifixion. Instead, we bring the symbol of his passion into the church. We genuflect before and reverence the cross. We pay homage to the thing that killed our Lord and Savior. It is a strange and improbable action. We do not usually honor implements of torture and death. I think we do it to remind ourselves of the extremes to which Jesus went to implant in his followers the importance of caring for and loving one another.

I recently heard a Christian say, “I am NOT my brother’s keeper.” Do we no longer understand the most basic tenant of Christianity? Jesus said, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”<sup>1</sup> And “Love thy neighbor as thyself.”<sup>2</sup> And “Love one another as I have loved you.”<sup>3</sup> And “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”<sup>4</sup> And “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus said it over and over again and in many different ways so that we would get it. Yet we still try to find a way to worm our way out of it. Let us remember our baptismal covenant to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourself.” Jesus gave his life that we would be determined to do just that. As we look

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:12 KJV

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 22:39 KJV

<sup>3</sup> John 13:34 NRSV

<sup>4</sup> John 15:13 NRSV

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:43-45a NRSV

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upon the crucified Christ let us once again resolve to live into that love commandment  
this day and always. a