

## God Friday

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on Good Friday, April 3, 2015.

*So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man." John 19:5*

It may seem difficult to believe, but Jesus' trial and suffering is a story of a man who is in control of the situation in his favor. This day is the next to the last step in accomplishing all that he set out to do. The religious officials, the weak-minded government authorities and the whims of the crowd were all part of the cast of characters in the drama of our redemption. The truth is that it was Jesus alone who chose to do God's will in giving himself up for us.

It has been wrongly assumed for too long that the Jews rejected Jesus and that they are responsible for his death. Nothing could be farther from the truth. While they did not comprehend the nature and purpose of his mission, it was not they who ordered his execution.

Jerusalem was a center of commerce that brought people from different cultures, races and religions from all over the known world. Crucifixion was a common form of public execution designed to humiliate one convicted of a crime. Most of them were occupied with their own daily concerns to pay attention to that day's events.

So who is to blame? Pontius Pilate as a high official of the Roman government did not see any evil in him worthy of condemning him to death. The crowd who called for his execution was a vast mixture of people, most of who never knew Jesus. They were likely more interested in reveling in the power to say who lives and who dies. The government officials who ordered Jesus' death were concerned with eliminating threats to the power and authority of the political and social order.

In the end, the need to please the crowd turned the tide in that hasty mock trial. In our own nation there are regions where people are proud of the high number of executions somehow sure of the guilt of those convicted.

What was found to be so threatening to the government officials was not that Jesus was trying to bring about an armed revolt, but that he envisioned a kingdom in which there would be no elite ruling class or oppressive dictators, only those who lived by the complete rule of God. To them, these were subversive and seditious ideas that would be disruptive to the social and political order.

I am sometimes asked how it is possible that Jesus could have died for the sins of the whole world. How could his death take away my sins when he didn't even know me? This is a question of the finite mind attempting to comprehend the nature of the infinite. If he were an ordinary man, it would be presumptuous to claim his death could take away our sins.

God understands our human condition and our need to be saved from ourselves. Jesus as fully God and fully human is the link between God and us. Were Jesus no more than an itinerate preacher on the street corner, he would have been lost to history as a religious quack making outrageous claims for himself. At the heart of our faith is that God in the person of Jesus set the example of self-sacrifice and selfless love that relieves the guilt of our sins, yours and mine. It's not so much that Jesus knows us personally, but because we know him personally he that becomes our Savior.

Though we like to think that we take a stand for what we believe, we all have our weak moments of doubt and skepticism, even fear. While Peter was the first to proclaim that Jesus was the Christ of God, in a weak moment of fear he denied knowing Jesus. You may feel that you are not a bad person, but we all have our faults and are therefore in need of redemption. We can feel good about ourselves while knowing that we are still fallible and need to do better.

It was denial that stood along side of the truth at Jesus' trial. We are in denial if we think we have all the answers. We are in denial to think we don't need to be saved from ourselves. There is something in the nature of the crowd in all of us.

What makes sense of Jesus' death is his compassion that extends down through the centuries for you and me. The origin of the word "good" originally meant, "holy." Jesus' example of selflessness redeems all the good in us and that is why we call this day "good."

