

Good Friday

Why is this night different from all other nights? This ancient question, spoken by the youngest person at a Passover Seder, brings to light the purpose of the gathering, the reason for being together.

As we move towards the climax of our religious year, this question is one we would do well to ask today, perhaps most of all. Why is this day different from all other days? In the story we are about to hear, Jesus is killed along with two criminals. But that is not different, criminals are punished all the time. Under Roman rule, people were crucified all the time. And their guilt lay in whatever the authorities deemed guiltworthy. In our own time, many, many people are incarcerated and legally shackled as criminals – many (presumably just about all) of them dispute the appropriateness or equity of their punishments. And many of us might even agree with them.

So why is this day different? Earlier in the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is described as one who is “without sin.” So whatever supposed crime he is being punished for, it cannot be a morally flawed transgression, so to speak, it must be subjective, a self-serving rule of view of somebody in power, a crime that would not be a crime if somebody else were in power – like the crime of being Jewish in Hitler’s Germany, or inconvenient in Stalin’s Russia, or, in modern American suburbia, being guilty of DWB: driving while black.

No, suffering is not unusual, not then, not now. We ask ourselves if we are in the most godly nation in the World – “One Nation, Under God,” or the least. On the one hand, we pride ourselves on competition, and individual achievement, even though that means we must continually separate

ourselves from each other. But God tells us to come together in love. How can we do both? On the other hand, our built-in separation and competition gives us the daily, even hourly choice of attitude about each other, we, of all nations, are a people who can continually choose how we treat our neighbors. What's godlier than that?

We thank God that the American experiment continues, despite all of its difficulties and frustrations and injustices. And we live in hope that we are destined to become a godlier people. But for Christians, today is the day when we suspend our ability to choose between separation. Today is the day when we are shown how it is done. The teacher solves the equation. The stuff hits the fan. The word and the action become one, and we are compelled to hear, see and know God's truth.

Because today God chooses to become fully one of us, even to the point of death. God doesn't have to do this. Today is when the power of choice forces its way into our souls unless we actively keep it out. And for the rest of our lives we will be able to look at our own crosses, whether they be outrageous fortunes or slightly annoying neighbors, spouses and children. Whether they be painful diseases or depressing habits. We will be able to move in an atmosphere and attitude of shared love because we know we've made a choice.