

Scripture Reading: Matthew 27:15-26

¹⁵ Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷ So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" ¹⁸ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. ¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. ²¹ The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²² Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³ Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" ²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵ Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶ So he released Barabbas for them, and after flogging Jesus he handed him over to be crucified.

Matthew 27:15-26 (Good Friday)

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"NCIS Gibbs' Rule #40: If You Think Someone's Out To Get You, They Are..."

Rev. Amy Terhune

If the 40s are in play, something unspeakably bad is going down. Throughout Lent, I've been using Gibbs' Rules for the hit CBS TV Show NCIS as a springboard for the sermon each week. This week, I'm hoping the connection is somewhat obvious. The scriptural record is clear that the powers-that-be in the ancient world were out to get Jesus. And he knew it, too. The gospel of John marks the conspiracy to kill off Jesus with the resurrection of Lazarus. That seems to be the last straw. But Matthew, Mark, and Luke indicate the pressure picks up when Jesus starts turning over the tables of the moneychangers in the temple. I suspect they're both true. Someone who can bring people back to life is dangerous. So is someone who won't abide by business as usual. So yeah, they're out to get him. But lest we get comfortable with the idea of pointing fingers at those bad guys way back then, established Christian theology has always maintained that today is the day the whole of humanity turned its back on God. Meaning that we're culpable. But God paid the price for us anyway. Which is good news. Something unspeakably bad is going down. No question. But we still call it good.

When my daughter was about ten, she said to me one time: why do we call Good Friday good, when Jesus died that day? So we talked about it. Good Friday is good because it proves God's enormous love for us. It's good because Jesus gave his life for mine. He died to save me from my sin, to wash me in grace, to usher me into the very presence of God. And she got it: So, we call it good because of what God has done for us? Yes. And she mulled that over for a second, and then she asked, "Well, it couldn't have been very good for Jesus. Isn't calling it "good" a little selfish?"

Interestingly, English speakers and Dutch speakers are the only ones who call today "Good". The Romance languages and the Slavic languages all call it Holy Friday. In the Chinese language, it's "Jesus Friday" (*Yēsū Shòunà-n-ri*). German Speakers call it "Mourning Friday" (*Karfreitag*). Gaelic speakers call it "Torment Friday" (*Aoine an Chéasta*). And the Scandinavian languages call it Long Friday (*Langfredag*). All of these names capture something of how we experience this day. And since Jesus' death and resurrection is the central concept that defines the Gospel narrative, we can all agree that this day brings good news for the state of souls.

Christians use a fancy word to describe this good news—atonement. That’s what we call Jesus’ gift to us on Good Friday. Atonement. Yet the best definition I ever heard for that word came from the lips of my Jr. High Sunday School teacher: Atonement means “At – one – ment”. At one. In Christ’s sacrifice, all the garbage and the sewage that has inched us apart from God is bridged, and we are restored to full relationship with God. We are made one again in Christ. We are precious, valued, loved. Good news indeed!

Recently, on the internet, I came across a video of a speech made by a preacher explaining how modern culture is having a tougher and tougher time relating to atonement. His argument was that we don’t want to owe anybody anything. We don’t want to be in anyone’s debt. We don’t want to admit that there are some things we cannot do for ourselves. We don’t want to acknowledge our baser selves. Now, I don’t know that I fully buy his argument, but I share his concern with that if Jesus’ crucifixion is allowed to be warped until it is nothing more than a myth—a story of another time—something precious will be lost. If Good Friday is just a story, it may be conveniently ignored and forgotten. But if Good Friday is just a story, why does it speak to our inmost being. Our vulnerability, our fragility, our neediness, and yes, our sinfulness—is a part of the reality of the human condition.

When I was fifteen, a gentle soul reached out to me and said “Amy, do you know that Jesus loves you—that Jesus knew your name when He died on that cross.” That was a message I desperately needed to hear—that I wasn’t a nameless face in the crowd. I was known, loved, special. Someone believed in all I could yet be. And it made all the difference in my life. Not a day goes by that I don’t give thanks for that moment of connection. If Good Friday is just a story, do I matter? Do I amount to anything? Does anyone believe in me? Maybe yes, maybe no. But if Good Friday is not just a story, then nobody—nobody—is a nobody. Good Friday is good because it declares our preciousness in God’s sight, our sacred worth despite our sinful nature. The whole world was out to get him, and Jesus died for us anyway. Because we matter. And so do others.

“In his book, *Lift High The Cross*, Robert Morgan tells about a most unusual cross that stood on the lawn of a Dallas church one Lenten season. The cross, which was about ten feet tall, created such a stir that pictures of it were carried by newspapers across the country and a television station in Dallas filmed it. It was an ugly thing—made from weapons of violence and crime, most of which had been confiscated by the Dallas Police Department. There were guns and pistols, knives and bayonets, bullets, bombs, and broken glass. The cross rose out of the remains of an automobile that had been involved in a drunken driving fatality. A barbed-wire enclosure, like they use at prisons, surrounded the whole thing. It was an ugly sight—a thing of violence and death—and it caused quite a controversy. The neighbors hated it—in fact, they started a petition to have it removed. Even the congregation’s members were repelled by it. They thought it was sacrilegious and had no place on the church grounds. But the pastor just commented, “The reactions to our Lenten display are understandable. No one wants to be reminded of our inhumanity toward each other. But isn’t that indeed the basis for the cross?” [from “The Cross No One Wants To See” by Lee Griess, www.Sermons.com.]

His point is well-taken. Nobody wants to admit that we are sinful. Nobody wants to sacrifice everything. Nobody wants to be reminded of our inhumanity toward each other. Nobody wants to think about suffering or death. Not even God. But neither did God want to give up on us. Thank God. We can call today whatever we’d like, but we’d best let it all in—the love, the life, the grace, the pain, the agony, the brutality. Because our message is Christ, and Him crucified. You don’t have to like it, but you need it. And so do I. I need it. The good news for Good Friday is that God knew what we needed, and even when the world was out to get him, God gave it...all. Amen.