

## Good Friday 2020

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Every Good Friday, the Passion from the Gospel of John is read in churches all over the world. Some ask why it is called “Good Friday”. I answer the question for myself by seeing in the Gospel of John the repetition of how much we are loved, and then seeing the example that we are to follow in loving others as Jesus loves us. The Collect that is in my mind daily during this season was written by Bishop Charles Henry Brent, who was Bishop of the Philippines and then of Western New York. It is a prayer for mission that is on page 101 in the Book of Common Prayer.

“Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name.”

This prayer speaks to me in a way that helps me understand why Good Friday is good. Jesus was not the victim in John’s telling of the crucifixion. He intentionally gave his life to continue his teaching about who and where God is. He had to speak against barriers between people and thus was a threat to the powers that be, the status quo, the way things are. He knew that teaching openly about his truth would get him killed, but he remained faithful to that truth.

Pilate’s question to Jesus, “What is truth?” is a question we all need to answer for ourselves. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” It takes a lifetime to begin to understand that truth. Since I haven’t finished my life yet, I do not claim to fully understand this truth.

It is good to read this part of the Gospel of John every year, because there is always more to learn about Jesus and how we are loved. There is always more to learn about how we all come from one creator, one source of life. We are all related. This pandemic should teach us that we are all in this together, if it teaches us nothing else. There is no wall and no law that can keep us completely separate from each other.

Jesus invariably called God “Father”. He was making theology practical. If God is Father, then all people are related; siblings, brothers and sisters. Jesus insistently taught that God was his Father and the Father of the human family. All the acts of Jesus were aimed at bringing people to the realization that he was who he said he was. He wanted people to believe that God sent him to reveal the truth of God—that everyone who accepted that he was sent for that purpose was, in fact, God’s beloved child.

I imagine the first phrase of Brent’s Collect in a vivid image: “Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace...” That stretching of his arms has no limits. It includes the entire world. When we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, with God’s help, we include everyone in our concern. Jesus, by choosing this particular manner of death, shows us that physical suffering, rejection by others, and apparent humiliation need not cause anyone to feel isolated or ashamed. No matter what sort of cross we are bearing, any threat or abuse we are facing, we are not alone. God, through Jesus, has promised to be with us. That is Good News.