

Good Friday's Good News

Good Friday is one of Christianity's greatest faith stories. It has many applications for our lives, including, where and as we work. Following are three of Jesus' experiences which apply to us. They are expressed in three of Jesus' words from the cross:

Father, forgive them. (Luke 23:34)

You have abandoned me. Why! (Matthew 28: 46)

Into your hands, I commend my spirit. (Luke 23: 46)

Father, forgive them. At one level, Jesus' cry was directed to the soldiers who crucified him; Roman justice, which denied him; several rabbis, who denounced him; disciples, who deserted him; the crowd, who mocked him; and the wider population, which could not have cared less. At another level, what Jesus said applied to his mother, Mary.

Can we even begin to imagine Mary's pain, standing with her son, watching his crucifixion, and the people's responses? Pain, rage, bewilderment! How could she ever forgive the soldiers, the rabbis, the disciples, etc? Yet, she must forgive, or what she was experiencing would consume and destroy her.

Not to forgive turns people inward on the self, breeding resentment and anger. Left unchecked, these feelings can destroy our spirits. They are two of evil's primary and most powerful weapons, to block people from receiving life as it can be. For Mary's mental, emotional and spiritual health, she must forgive.

Jesus' words to Mary said, in effect: *Let me forgive these people for you. Let me take this burden from you. If I do not, then, evil wins. Like a cancer, resentment and anger will fester and destroy you.*

The workplace can be cruel. Someone (figuratively) stabs us in the back. Someone robs us of our savings. A home is foreclosed. The schemer advances. Rewards and benefits escalate for the few, while the many suffer. Injustices and false accusations get the upper hand. The list is as endless!

Some of these experiences can be so horrible, the damage never heals. In time, we remember them less frequently, and when we do, for short periods of time. But, their intensity never diminishes or leaves. Resentment and anger breed and fester, even though we may not want consciously to go down that route. But, they are there and they are strong! Each of us can resonate with Mary's pain at her son's cross.

When we cannot forgive, Jesus will for us. If we cannot mouth the words to ask him, turning to Jesus *as we are able* is sufficient. Jesus will forgive, thus relieving us of the terrible burden of resentment. Memories remain, but their effects lose their ability to break us.

You have abandoned me! Why? Sometimes, a life experience is so shattering, we perceive that God has abandoned us. But, as Jesus learned, God never abandons us. Perception and reality are not the same.

When we hit bottom, we enter a holy space. It is where Jesus went, and now returns to meet us. He assures us: *I've been there. I appreciate how you feel. Now, let me share the burden with you. Let me show you the way, and we'll go forward, together.*

In our weaknesses that Christ's power becomes most strong. He gives us empathy, explained in the Gospels. He helps us endure, even when something dies. And looking forward, we recognize that everyone's Good Friday is only half a story. The other half is Easter - resurrection and new beginnings.

As God helped Jesus recognize these truths, he was able to say...*Into your hands, I commend my spirit.* After having perceived that God had abandoned him, Jesus was able to do a quick "180," and cry out in faith + relief. When Jesus' perception of God's abandonment was at its strongest, God's activity did what seemed impossible. This Good News is now our Good News, which Jesus shares with us.

The workplace can be extremely cruel, so much so, that the word *crucify* is part of its lexicon. The Good News of Good Friday gives us empathy, encouragement, and hope. Jesus knows how we feel. He stands with us in empathy. He will lead us toward our Easters. The way may include awful suffering. But, as Jesus assures us, evil and suffering will never have the last word! Where God is, there is Life!

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