

“Good/Evil – Evil/Good”

Dr. Luther, in Thesis 21 of his Heidelberg Disputation (1518) writes: “A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.” So what do we do with our Gospel reading from St. John? Do we dare call this day in the Church Year – GOOD Friday?

On this day, Jesus is betrayed by one of His own disciples, one of the twelve. Jesus is handed over by His fellow countrymen – arrested and bound by those of His own bloodline. And then one of His closest disciples betrays Him as well. “I am not” one of Jesus’ disciples, Peter says. While Jesus is on trial – being questioned without a care for justice, His teaching struck down and His face struck with a fist – Peter is outside saying “I don’t know the man” until the rooster crows.

The Son of God, come in the flesh – is bound and dragged like a piece of flesh to the leader of the occupying forces. His fellow Jews are more concerned about their Passover being disrupted – than whether they are calling for the death of an innocent man. Standing before the governor – Jesus’ kingdom is challenged. He who is “the truth” is denied by Pilate who scoffs, “what is truth?”

You think it’s bad being the last kid picked for a team – try being passed over for a deranged criminal. As the hymn says – “A murderer they save, the Prince of life they slay.” The innocent One is bound, and the guilty one goes free. What GOOD is there in that?

The falsely condemned Innocent One is not afforded the right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment – He flesh is flogged to shreds – a thorny crown is beaten into His head – He’s dressed up and mocked, spit upon, punched repeatedly.

The death chants reverberate from the crowds outside – crucify Him, crucify Him. Why? What has my Lord done? “He has made Himself the Son of God.” NO, He IS the Son of God – begotten of the Father from all eternity – and He’s treated as the lowest of lowlives. He, through whom all things were created – is treated as a nothing.

He who did not fully use His authority over all things – has to listen to a weak, cowardly governor’s claim to having authority over Him. Pilate knows Jesus is innocent – but he hands Him over anyway – washing his hands of Him.

And soon the nails are driven through His hands, stapling Him to the wood of the cross. He’s hanging with the guilty criminals. He’s stripped naked and plundered. Mocking mouths and wagging heads are all around. And there stands His mother, having to endure all this. He sees that her soul is pierced too. This is GOOD?

The end is near. “I thirst.” The body has endured more than meets the eye. “It is finished,” and He bowed His head and gave up the Spirit.” Is this where we find some GOOD – that the agony is finally over – that He doesn’t have to suffer anymore?

Even then His dead body is poked and pierced, and drained. It’s hastily taken down. In life He had no place to lay His head – and now, in death, no place to lay His body. So Joseph of Arimathea wraps Him, anoints Him, and places Him in his borrowed tomb.

What looks like evil – Christians for 2,000 years have called good – GOOD Friday.

To the world, that’s about as crazy as saying GOOD Pandemic! Only an insensitive fool would say such a thing. After all, people are suffering, isolate, and stressed. “I’m short with my wife, and she’s mad at me.” “My children are driving me crazy! I have to take care of them 24/7.”

It’s GOOD for parents to remember that their children are theirs – and they are responsible for them. It is GOOD for parents and children and siblings to spend more time together – than with co-workers, schoolmates, or teammates. It’s GOOD for a husband to confess his sin and beg his wife’s forgiveness – and for her to forgive him, and be reconciled to him.

Christians are isolated too – not able to gather for worship services – or Lenten dinners, or weddings or funerals. The Lenten Fast is not supposed to be a fast from the Lord's Supper – but health warnings have made us shrink back. "This pandemic is ruining our Easter!"

Fasting is GOOD – but with all that has been curtailed – it will be GOOD to break the fast and get back to the things we have taken for granted – the hearing of God's Word, receiving the Lord's Body and Blood, and rejoicing in "the communion of saints."

Virtual, 2 dimensional services that you can hold in your hand, or watch on a tablet or TV – may suffice for a time – but cannot replace the Divine Service to real live people. Our God is not a virtual God – He's real, in the flesh, He has body and blood. He's not far away, distant, or make-believe – He has come from heaven to earth to dwell with us. And that, is GOOD indeed.

This pandemic has made us pay attention to our physical body and life. We're washing hands, covering coughs, wearing masks – all because of something we cannot see – but have been lead to believe is all around us.

It is GOOD to realize that we are mortal – that death surrounds us always. Death is not virtual either, or merely a potential – it is real, and immanent, and unavoidable. It is GOOD that we learn to suffer with Jesus – whose death was real, and immanent, and unavoidable.

GOOD Friday? EVIL Friday? "A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it actually is." This pandemic IS part of the Fallen Creation – the result of man's sin – a foretaste of the hell to come.

The crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ – however – IS the true glory of God. It IS the truest manifestation of His love, that He would lay down His life – not just for a friend – but for His enemies, for mockers, haters, beaters – for all sinners – for you & I.

The shedding of Christ's blood IS the sacrifice that atones for all sin – the debt of sin paid in full – God's wrath turned away forever. The blood of Jesus Christ redeems all creation from sin – including the pandemic chaos, fear and death that sin brings.

It is a GOOD Friday indeed – for, “It is finished.” Now remember, a theologian of the cross calls a thing what IT is – but what is IT – what “is finished”?

Your salvation. You are saved from sin, death and the devil. The crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ IS your salvation – and that is most certainly GOOD. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.