

Good Friday
April 10, 2009

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In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Each of the four Gospels, though relating the same story, has its own unique emphasis. This is particularly true of the several accounts of Jesus' Passion. Whereas Matthew focuses on the royalty of Christ, as revealed in his humiliation, Luke emphasizes Jesus' compassion in such words as "Father, forgive them" and his concern for the penitent thief. Mark, the account which we heard on Palm Sunday this year, focuses on Jesus' suffering and John, the version appointed for every Good Friday, speaks of Jesus' glorification and triumph. Whatever the particular emphasis the bottom line of all four Passion narratives is the proclamation of the Good News that by God's, unmerited, undeserved and unearned grace, we are all of us no matter who we are or what we have done, our sins are forgiven and our relationship with God through Christ is restored. If I may be a bit flip, the good news of the cross is in part that we will not get what we deserve. I don't know about you, but that is good news for me. In the earliest year of my own ordained ministry I remember calling on a woman in the hospital and she began to complain about her neighbor who – to use her words – misbehaved all the time and yet nothing ever seemed to happen to him and there she was in the hospital and then she said to me – you know, all I want from God is what I deserve and I sort of looked and I said "Are you sure about that?" I don't know about you, but I don't want what I have coming. Today, I offer you my own meditation on the cross with its proclamation of God's grace and forgiveness. In this scene I imagine myself as Judas Iscariot engaged in conversation with the crucified Jesus.

Who is that standing there looking up at me?

It's me, Judas Iscariot.

Judas, you look terrible! I didn't recognize you.

You don't look so good yourself, Jesus. Besides you'd look terrible too if you'd been beat up on for as long as I have.

Tell me about it, my friend.

Friend! Some friend I turned out to be. You remember – well, how could you not – how I turned you in to the authorities. I got thirty pieces of silver. Believe me, Jesus; from the moment I did it I regretted it. I tried to give the money back but they refused saying it was blood money. I wanted the money, make no mistake about that. I could live in style. I was a poor man. We live in tough economic times. I saw an opportunity and I took it. Besides you weren't meeting any of my expectations of what a Messiah was supposed to be. All that talk

about God's new world order coming and love and peace and the powerful falling and hope for the marginalized. Nothing was happening!! The damned Romans were still in charge! The Temple authorities were living like fat cats! Nothing was changing, don't you see?! I thought you were naïve or nuts and if I could make a buck!

You did disappoint me Judas, but why are you here now? What do you want?

I've spent almost two thousand years with people's feet on my neck. People say "traitor!" and my name is the first one that comes to mind all except for a few Americans, who might think of Benedict Arnold. Everyone seems to project their own evil onto me. I'm the most hated and rejected person in human history. There's nothing worse than rejection, Jesus. But I guess I don't need to tell you about that. I'm a good person! I got caught up in my own greed! I didn't know what I was doing or the consequences for you or for myself.

Judas! What do you want?

I've been listening to people talk about you for centuries, mostly preachers. I've heard them say that no one is beyond God's love and God's grace, how you died for the sins of the whole world and how God has no favorites; how God offers forgiveness even to those who don't deserve it; that the Kingdom of heaven is open to all who sincerely seek it. That all sounds like great news.

That's all true, Judas, but what do you want?

Jesus, I want to know if I'm included too; does your forgiveness extend to me? Did you die, are you dying for me?

I've been waiting for you for a very long time, Judas. I've been hoping, I've been praying that one day you'd come. Welcome home my friend. It is finished. It is truly finished.