

# Good Friday

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I probably speak for many when I say that this Lent has been unique, unexpected, especially difficult.

When Lent began, before the reality of COVID-19 hit, I decided to try and do something that really, I'm supposed to be doing already. I decided to pray for my enemies. The word "enemy" sounded a little extreme, so I modified enemy to be anyone I was angry with. Each day, I would select a candidate, and pray a blessing for them. While it was not hard to think of potential candidates, I soon found it was very hard to pray for them. I did a fairly terrible job actually.

Soon, during Lent, the reality of COVID-19 became manifest, as the world seemingly turned upside down. Being in the healthcare field, feelings of lack of control, and powerlessness to heal, have abounded, as I have seen those around me suffer in many different ways.

So it is with these feelings, both of failure in my Lenten resolution, and of powerless to heal that I have been sitting a lot with these readings from Good Friday. Observing Jesus, who could forgive those who crucified him. Observing Jesus, whose humility held the power to forever change the world.

The verses in John from tonight that particularly mean a great deal to me are: "I thirst," and "It is finished."

To back up, the Easter Triduum begins with the Last Supper. Before Jesus went to the cross, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that the last meal, the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples, was a Passover Seder meal, described in a Jewish text known as the Passover Haggadah, formalized by the time of Jesus.

Described in the Haggadah, during the Passover Seder meal four cups of wine are consumed, with each cup corresponding to the four promises God made to Israel in the book of Exodus.... The four promises from Exodus 6, corresponding to the four cups, are... "I will bring you out... I will rescue you... I will redeem you... and I will take you as my own." (Exodus 6:6-7)

The last cup of the Passover seder meal, the cup of consummation, corresponds to the final promise... "I will take you as my own..." (Exodus 6:6-7). Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, God promises that "you will be my people." The Hebrew word for "my people" also translates to "my family." This promise, "I will take you as my own," is the promise of being one in God's family.

We are told by Paul (1 Cor 10:16), and it can be seen through the lens of the Passover, that the cup that Jesus blessed and distributed during the Last Supper was the third cup, known as the Cup of Blessing.

In the Passover seder, the third cup of wine, the cup of blessing, is followed by a hymn known as the Great Hallel, then by the drinking of the fourth cup of wine, the cup of consummation.

However, the Gospels tell us that after the third cup, Jesus does an unusual thing. He skips the fourth cup. In fact, he even announces that he would be skipping the fourth cup, saying "I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:27-29). The gospels tell us Jesus drank the third cup, then sang the "Great Hallel," then instead of drinking the fourth cup goes immediately to the Mount of Olives. (Mark 14:26; Matthew 26:30)

Why did Jesus skip the fourth cup? When does he drink again from the fruit of the vine in his kingdom as he said he would?

References to cups of wine abound around Jesus' death. After skipping the fourth cup, in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prays twice "may this cup be taken from me." (Matthew 26:39, 42). When the guards finally come to arrest Jesus, and Peter draws his sword and strikes the servant of the high priest, Jesus stops Peter and says "Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?" (John 18:11) Earlier, Jesus had cautioned James and John on the meaning of the cup, saying "Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" (Matthew 20:22).

On the way to the cross, Jesus continues to turn down the fourth cup. Mark's gospel tells us while Jesus was carrying his cross, he was offered wine, but did not take it (Mark 15:23).

So when does Jesus finally take this fourth cup, when does he drink from the fruit of the vine again?

John's gospel from tonight tells us that it was only when Jesus was on the cross that he takes the fourth cup. John tells us "so that scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I thirst'" (John 19:28-30) and was given the wine that he earlier said he would not drink until he came into his kingdom. John doesn't just tell us that Jesus was thirsty, but highlights: "so that scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I thirst.'" John further tells us that this wine was delivered on a hyssop branch, a symbol of Passover, and after he took the wine, he said "it is finished." (John 19:30)

What was finished, through the lens of the Passover Haggadah, was the promise of Passover.

The fourth cup, the cup that finishes the Passover, the cup of consummation, is the cup that corresponds to the promise God has made: "I will take you as my own." (Exodus 6:6-7)

After Jesus takes this wine, and says "it is finished," John tells us Jesus gave up his spirit (John 19:30), his spirit he later gives to us on Pentecost.

When I first heard the words "I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom," I had always pictured a royal banquet, not a cross. John shows us that the "kingdom" that Jesus is coming into is not a banquet, but rather a kingdom of divine love, given freely.

"I will take you as my own." When I contemplate his death on the Cross, I hear Jesus saying... "I will take you as my own." When I listen to the words of Isaiah from tonight, who 700 years earlier described the death of Jesus, who describes Jesus "pouring out his soul" for us (Isaiah 53:12) I hear God saying "I will take you as my own."

Salvation is not about what I do for God, it's about what God does with me, with us. Given my feelings of powerlessness, this is very good news.

When I think about my failed Lenten resolution, about all the times I have failed to do what I know I should, when I feel my powerlessness, I hear the promise of God, "I will take you as my own". Thank God that it is not about what I failed to do, it is about what God has done.

John tells us later that, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that God loved us..." (1 John 4:10).

The words, "I thirst," resonate on so many levels. They describe a physical thirst, they reflect a fulfillment of the Passover promise, but in them I also hear the words of Mother Teresa, or now Saint Teresa of Calcutta. In the words "I thirst," Mother Teresa said that Jesus was describing his thirst for us. Mother Teresa said this... "... have you seen with the eyes of your soul how Jesus looks at you with love? Do you really know the living Jesus, not from books but from being with him in your heart? Have you heard the loving words he speaks to you?... not only does he love you, but even more... he longs for you. He misses you when you don't come close. He thirsts for you. He loves you always, even when you don't feel worthy."

"He thirsts for you. He loves you always, even when you don't feel worthy."

This is what makes Good Friday good.