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**Good Friday (Mark 15:1-41)**

***Not the killer, but the killed***

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Good Friday is a tough day. It's a day when someone dies, and that someone is Jesus. People thought they understood him, but in the end, many of them couldn't take it, couldn't watch, couldn't be with him as he continued to stand up for love, continued to walk to his death falsely accused.

Today we stay with death and violence and destruction and desertion and misunderstanding. What is 'good' about today?

It seems like all of lent at Benedictus has been about this day, Good Friday, and its meaning.

I offer this reflection holding all that Sarah has shared with us in Lent.

William Loader writes on the meaning of the Good Friday in a piece entitled *God of the Mountain (adapted)*. He begins quoting Jesus' words from the cross in Luke's gospel:

*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34)*

But we know - do we?

The spike of the club had pierced her right temple. Inside the brain was now pressed to the left side by the blow, the right side filled with blood, preserved in the frozen corpse, a human sacrifice from Inca times found atop Mount Ampato in Peru. The museum video in Arequipa explained how the 12 year old girl will have been prepared to die for her people, will have trekked many kilometres to her last moment. She would die to appease the angry god of the mountain. Then the famine would break. Her people would be saved. A little Jesus above the Amazon - or so it seemed in the National Geographic video.

And here on Golgotha another god appeased? God's own son made to suffer a violent death by his father, to appease the father's anger and save

us all? Or so it seems in much that we hear and say. Gods of violence sanctioning people of violence. No forgiveness without revenge - on someone, as long as it is on someone. A matter of honour, ensuring punishments are enacted, penalties paid in full. Is our God of the "hill far away" related to the God of the mountain far away? Is that what the cross is about? Is that what we know? Close the books, the debt is paid, all is forgotten, we are safe from the anger of the mountain god. This young man was spiked for us and for our sins.

*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*  
But we know - do we?

What if God is not like that? What if God is not trapped by the rules of honour and punishment? What if God just loves and is free to forgive without having to punish us or someone else in our place? What if God is like the father in the parable who ran to embrace his son and didn't have to beat him or anyone else in his stead before doing so? What if God isn't the mountain god who needs appeasing but by God's nature wants to love, to create, to renew, to restore? What if Jesus embodies that love and shows it willing to endure even to the end? What if it is God whom we see in Jesus willing to love to the end? What if God is not the killer but the killed?

What if the killing god is the god of the killers, determined not to love, wanting to discard the troublemaker, unwilling to leave room for generosity that will not be tamed by the rules of punishments, the debts of accounting, by the principles of honour and appeasement?

*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34)*

But we know - do we?

Why do we hatch up explanations which protect the dignity of a killing, punishing, vengeful God? Why do we want to say God could only love by first finding a victim to take his punishment, to balance his debts? Why do we want a God who has to be paid off? How does it benefit us to ensure the sums are done and the generosity is not pure generosity? Why must God be a mountain god? Is it because we can then have a sense of control; the sums are done, the books are balanced, we can close the books? Is it because it allows us still to hold on to our own ways of violence and calculation, our own demands that people appease us or pay for it?

What if God just keeps coming, keeps opening the books, keeps challenging us with love and hope, keeps looking into our eyes, keeps accompanying our frailty and our failures in an ongoing relationship of love and hope?

*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*  
But we know - do we?

What if we see on this cross not a transaction with an offended mountain god, but a revelation at a moment of time of the love which is eternally in the heart of God, lived out in the long trek of Jesus? What if we smile at our failed and compromised images of paid penalties, sacrificial blood, punishments, all of which reflected some truth but also distorted it, and see in this historical moment a climax of lived love and lived hate, of the gods of religion and the God of compassion? Then he died for us, against us, within us, before us - in a moment frozen in time for all time. And perhaps, then, we begin to know.

*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*  
But we know - do we?<sup>1</sup>

I say Good Friday is re-remembering, honouring, opening to love in a violent world, open to a God who is not violent, who is present with us, who is love. Good Friday is when violence seems to win. Lean into it, embrace love. It is time to reassess, to change our mindsets, to open to the love of God in Jesus.

Maybe William Loader is right, 'Jesus died for us, against us, within us, before us - in a moment frozen in time for all time'.

It seems God is about grace and endless love, about life-giving not taking away. But today we are still left with the death nonetheless ... the end of the story is yet to unfold.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/mountain.htm>