

# Full to the Brim: A Cup of Sorrow

Good Friday

John 19:1-30  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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April 15, 2022

- **What is the meaning of the cross?**
- **What is it that got Jesus killed?**
- **Why did Jesus have to die?**

The Church, with a capital C, has never come to a complete agreement on just one answer to those questions. For indeed, there are many answers. For example, one side of the theological spectrum, then and still very popular today, contends that **God's ultimate purpose for sending Jesus is that he came to die.** God's wrath over our sinfulness and disobedience required punishment. And the only way for things to be made right with God is through a sacrificial atonement to pay for those sins. Because the sacrifice needed to be perfect in every way, God sent Jesus to die a sacrificial death in order to pay the price and take on the punishment we deserve. This is accomplished through redemptive violence. That means the only way we can be redeemed and forgiven by God is through the violence inflicted upon Jesus.

**Here's another way to put this: Dying was Jesus' reason for living.** That message will be preached in countless churches, including many in our Presbyterian denomination, on this Good Friday evening.

I came across an article on [progressivechristianity.org](http://progressivechristianity.org) entitled "Good Friday? A Reflection". It was written in 2012 and is simply attributed to First Presbyterian Church, Elizabethton, Tennessee. Responding to the statement, "Dying was his reason for living", it simply asks, "Really?" This article from the progressive side of the theological spectrum continues this way.

Much of Christian theology has been used to induce guilt and shame. You are so bad that Jesus had to die on the cross. The bloodier and more painful the death serves to demonstrate the depth of your depravity. You deserve all that beating. But Jesus took it for you. **That [especially here in the Bible Belt] is default Christianity. I call it spiritual abuse.**

Jesus had a life before he died. The things he did and the things he said were provocative enough to put him on the wrong side of the authorities. From the things people remembered that he did and said, he was critical of the authorities. He was critical of the religious authorities and of the political authorities.

*That is what got him killed.*

He challenged systems of authority that took advantage of widows, of the poor, and of the outcast. He created a movement. And it was threatening enough

that those in power felt the need to stop him. Perhaps to make of him an example.

*That is what got him killed.*

He was on the side of people who were oppressed by the economic policies of the temple. He was on the side of people considered unclean and sinners by the religious.

*That is what got him killed.*

He is remembered for telling parables and stories that upset people. He used a phrase "kingdom of God." That phrase means little to us because we have tamed it. Most folks, thanks to the theologians, think it is another phrase for heaven, a place the true believers go when they die.

It is likely that it was a political statement. It was a social statement. It was a statement of hope. **As opposed to the kingdom of Caesar, imagine what the kingdom of God is like.** It wasn't just a fantasy, a story. It was a movement. This is the kingdom to live for, to work for, perhaps even to die for. It is a kingdom of justice and compassion. In this kingdom, in this political economy the hungry are filled with good things. Now let's make it so. That was Jesus' message.

Jesus was about making changes in this world.

*That is what got him killed.*

He talked about compassion. He talked about moving beyond ethnic boundaries and divisions. He talked about forgiveness. Not something you go to the priest for or even to God for, but your neighbor. The neighbor is who we hurt, not God. The neighbor is the one from whom we need forgiveness. We get it as we give it.

Jesus worked to bring people together: Samaritan and Jew, Greek and Roman. He practiced an open table, rich and poor, male and female. He challenged unjust boundaries and rules.

*That is what got him killed.*

Dying was not his reason for living.

***Living was his reason for dying.***

For life, he died. For integrity, he died. For compassion, he died. For justice, he died. For change, he died.

He was in the way. He was in the way of progress. He was in the way of Rome...

Jesus was a victim of [state-sponsored] imperial terrorism.

There was and is nothing sacred and holy about the execution and torture of Jesus or of anyone. If anything, remembering the death of Jesus should summon us to honor life not death.

It should give us the courage and commitment to speak out and not remain silent in the face of torture, execution, violence, injustice, and needless suffering around the world...

Obviously, Christianity evolved and moved in all kinds of directions and embraced many different mythologies and interpretations, and some of them quite good and helpful. But it is important not to lose sight of our roots. The earliest interpretation of the death and resurrection of Jesus is this:

***In Christ, Empire's brutality is overcome by God's justice.***

...Whenever any of us stands up for those who are abused or put down or who suffer injustice from bullies big and small, we practice true religion.

We live in the example and spirit of Jesus.

Only if today helps us to live a life that matters can we dare call it Good Friday.

It must be stated, however, that regardless of the reason for Jesus' death, this story of the cross, the crucifixion, can be interpreted in the following way. **We can find rest and peace with the assurance of whatever it is we think it is that separates us from God has been taken care of in full. Perhaps we would have never fully known and lived into this reality without this story of Jesus' death on the cross.**

Amen.

Resource:

"Good Friday? A Reflection", First Presbyterian Church, Elizabethton Tennessee, April 6, 2012.

<https://progressivechristianity.org/resources/good-friday-a-reflection/>