

Year C*Good Friday*2010*He Died for Our Sins
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I grew up believing that Jesus died to save us from our sins,
that Jesus' death on the cross somehow made it possible for the world to be forgiven.
"He's got the whole world in his hands" we sang as children and it was easy to believe.

I also grew up believing that he had to do it.
It was something only he could do.
There was something unique about Jesus that made this his job, uniquely his job.
My dad was an engineer.
My mom raised a family.
Jesus saved the world.

Some ordinary, holy, priest at some point said "how much does God love you". Then he stretched his arms out as if he were on a cross and said, "This much." That was so clear and true. So I grew up believing the cross of Jesus was a sign of love, the greatest sign of God's love.

Then came the questions.
Why did he have to die?
Couldn't God just forgive us?
Did his blood have to be shed for the love and forgiveness the holding-the-world-in-his-hand to happen?

As a young person we sang "Oh the Blood of Jesus,
oh the blood of Jesus,
oh the blood of Jesus,
it cleanses white as snow."

As a young priest that came into question. I remember Bob Davidson, a friend and deacon and excellent tennis player. He was also a good golfer. We were with two other clergy golfing at some clergy retreat. We were stepping off the tenth tee when Bob, who was the living definition of gregarious, said, "What do you think guys. Does Jesus' blood wash you white as snow?"

Now golf is a difficult game. It is not made easier by extremely difficult theological questions. To my surprise the other two guys say "No". These were good priests. Lovers of Jesus and servants of the Church. But I realized at that point that I had never taken the phrase very seriously.

But I began to move away from the blood of Jesus and the necessity of his sacrifice and his agony. I began to read and feel sympathy for poems like this. This lovely poem is entitled "*Gethsemane*." It is by Andrea Ayvazian.

The garden is fenced now
I had to peer through the bars to see
where you once knelt

but I could move my position
first here then there
through the bars and the olive trees
I saw

We're told you sweated blood
that terrifying night

that terrifying night
the sweat, the fear, the blood
the endless loneliness

that terrifying night
followed by that terrifying day

You were so brave
but there was more blood

the kiss, the tears, the nails, the blood
the death

The garden is fenced now
people crowd
and lean and push

But I saw you hunched
over the rock

and I know you heard me
say

You did not have to die
a violent death for me

I would have loved you
if your passage
from this world to
Your Abba had been
bloodless and serene
I would still have loved you.

It's a beautiful, tender, thought and I have sympathy for Andrea and her insight. But I wonder. I wonder if the Bible, the Church, the Scriptures are deeper than she is, wiser than I am, more able to face real life than we have been.

Because life was terrifying and still is sometimes and I wonder if he had to die terribly to open some door that was shut tight.

As life went on for me I learned more about forgiveness-
How hard it is on people who have had to forgive me.
How far, for some stupid reason, I had to go in my sin before I really wanted to change, really was willing to make the changes needed to change.

Then I imagine how my stupidity and stubbornness play out on a global stage.

What will it take to end starvation,
corruption,
greed,
violence?

I wonder if it must take something great, almost unimaginable, almost unbelievable.
It must take something very hard to save the world.

Who has a language more deep, more real, more searching, more gutsy than the church?

Real forgiveness is not easy. Not for us.
Not for God.
It is very hard.

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray at Morning Prayer, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.

Maybe Jesus was no accident,
the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time.
Maybe **he was** sent.

Sent, not only to show us the way but also to be the way.
Maybe the ancient, in-the-bones-stubbornness and stupidity of our race requires the direct intervention of a god, a real God, but a God willing to sacrifice rather than kill. A human being willing to show the way and be the way.

I find this not only poetically attractive, musically inspiring, but also compelling truth that I can believe.

Maybe it was something only he could do.

Not the Buddha, whom I love and learn from.
Not Muhammad whom I am trying to understand.
Not Lao Tzu, with whom I was in harmony from his first mysterious poem.

Jesus. And only Jesus.

I am discovering that I can say that and believe it.
Not with arrogance or without doubt,
but from the heart.

My work is to join Jesus in his on-going mission to reconcile the world to God-
not to paste him on, as an after thought, to my opinions and agenda.

He is the heart of the matter.
He is the heart of matter.
He is the heart of all that matters.

He saved the world.
He was the only one who could.
We must enter into his salvation.