

Good Friday  
St. John 18:1-19:42  
March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016  
St. George's Bolton  
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## What's So Good About This Friday?

I had mixed emotions as a child about this observing this day, maybe because I was confused. How could you call a day "good" on which Jesus suffered so much? Isn't that dark and bad? When I think of Good Friday, I think of a dark, dismal overcast day, the way this one began this morning. Such weather portends a sort of foreboding mood, which I think is not inappropriate.

Friday is associated in many minds as one of the best days of the week, filled with dreams to be fulfilled, a time when we are freed from the responsibilities of our work.

**Good Friday Morning...** So it's Good Friday morning, and I sleep an hour later and get some much-needed rest. This is good and feels Sabbath-like. I start the day feeling better. Then, for some reason I remember that several years ago, that my neighbor across the hall had just died on Good Friday morning and I recall the undertakers doing the grim task of "removing" her away from her home of over 30 years for the last time. ... Remembering a death humbles me and reminds me what this day is all about.

Good Friday morning. I make my morning coffee, and I look around the kitchen for what I might eat for breakfast. Then I remember. This is Good Friday, a day of fasting and prayer. Fasting means not eating and foregoing my desires. For many, this is a lost thought and way of living. Remember when every Friday

was a fish day or a day when you refrained from eating meat if you were a Christian? Most folks are going about their business today as though this is just another day, like any other. But I try to be mindful of what I shall or shall not eat for the rest of the day. The Episcopal Church encourages two days of fasting and prayer on its kalendar each year: Ash Wednesday and of course, today.

Good Friday used to be "good" because it is a holiday, and many had the day off. For some, it is now a "floating holiday" you can use anytime which is even better. Few will remember the connection with Holy Week. When I checked at work yesterday, I found out that Good Friday is no longer honored as a "holiday" where you are given the day off. This is new. When I checked with my co-workers, few knew that today was going to be Good Friday, and there were even a few who were not aware that this weekend we celebrate Easter. "I don't like those holidays like Halloween and Easter with all that candy and junk food," one of my fellow employees said. Imagine that Easter has become merely a candy holiday to amp up the kids!

I bumped into a 74 year-old woman at the mailboxes in our lobby this noontime. We both were surprised there was mail delivery today. We reminisced about how the world around us came to a grinding halt on Good Friday, years ago when we were young. Businesses were almost all closed, and people were in Church for long liturgies and services, like the three-hour "*Seven Last Words from the Cross*" in my home church, which consisted in seven sermons followed by litanies and much prayer and devotional hymn singing. That was St. James's West Hartford in the 1950's and 60's. In those days it was hard to get a seat in the church which seats over a thousand worshipers on a given Good

Friday. And well, Easter, you better arrive pretty early if you wanted a seat at one of the five services they held.

Today, Good Friday is *good* to me because I took it off as a vacation day. It gave me a chance to finish some things I have left undone, in particular, the Good Friday Sermon. Time off is good because it puts us in charge of our own time. We can do with it what we wish. We can rest and re-create as we may need to. We can be as productive as we wish. This freedom is a good feeling. Does it remind us of the freedom we enjoy because of what Jesus did on this day?

- Freedom from the punishing weight of guilt and sin.
- Freedom love God or not love God.
- Freedom to love ourselves and be good to ourselves.
- Freedom from the words *should* and *must*.

Such freedom is a very good feeling and a relief!

Friday is *good* because it means we are free from the responsibilities of our 9-5 jobs. We are really free for a couple of days. We are free to do what we want to do. We are free to do what we need to do. Good Friday frees us up to act on the love we should be feeling and taking action upon. It stimulates our imaginations, not about what our lives were, but what they could be if we made love the real priority of our lives.

Friday is *good* because it is a night when many go out to eat-and plan to stay out late because the whole weekend is before them, and they don't have to get up early on Saturday morning. It is the beginning of *our time* off. Friday is filled with hope of the potential it forebodes and the possibilities it brings. "Happy Friday" is the cry heard in the work and marketplace. It is a greeting that brings hope and good cheer to many. Good Friday is a day that should bring hope to all who hear these words, again

for the possibilities it suggests to move on and ahead with our lives.

Friday is *good* for a gathering at the local pub, where many gather to lift a glass and socialize with friends, while discussing the really important things like basketball or baseball. And much laughter and joy is heard about the room. Good Friday we lift another cup and drink in its contents deeply to remember and renew ourselves. What a precious and priceless vintage this is!

Friday is *good* because the most of the new movies open in theaters on a Friday, usually starting at noon. And Friday is *good* because many musical concerts are held on Friday evening, probably because more people will come out and attend them. And Friday is *good* because for many it is "date night" and that is great thing to look forward to all week. Friday has so many positive associations which lift it above the other days of the week. **Good Friday** has one major positive association because on this day Jesus was lifted high above the earth on a cross for us, making this day, this Friday, the best and most important Friday of them all. Isn't it amazing how our cultural associations effect how we think of Friday as perhaps the most anticipated and celebrated day of the week?

What other day has TGIF-*Thank God It's Friday*? You wouldn't say that about Monday, would you? Every Friday is *good* because of TGIF- it's almost the end of the week and a couple of days off are just around the bend.

Good Friday is *good* because Lent is almost all over. ...Church bells ring out throughout the city, marking the worship happening far below. Parades of worshipers make their way from church to church, in many cities and towns on this day, as Christians of

various faiths come together for this special Friday remembrance. It is a special witness and reminder of what the day is about each year for those who witness these public parades.

Good Friday is not the feast of a martyr. Jesus is not a martyr. Jesus did not die for a cause. Jesus didn't die to become famous. If so, his tomb would be the center of our faith. But I don't think so.

Good Friday is a victim free zone. It may be very popular these days to figure out *whose* victim you are. When I identify with being oppressed or someone's victim, I am no longer free, but I am held in bondage by my perceived victimhood. The truth is I am no one's victim, but my own. If I wear the clothes of a victim, I have chosen to.

On this day, this Good Friday, Jesus is neither a martyr nor really a victim either, despite the ancient hymn by Thomas Aquinas, "*O saving victim opening wide the gates of heaven to man below...*" Jesus is no one's victim. He could have halted the proceedings at any moment. He didn't. He wasn't running the popularity contest for super victim of all time. He chose to give himself for us, that we might be free of being the victims of sin and death.

This Friday is *good* because it is a gift to us. Friday is *good* because Jesus is a sacrifice. Jesus gave his life for us, that we might live. He literally died instead of us. *Who does that?* The sin that is slowly killing us is sent retreating into remission, now we have a chance to live. Now we have a chance to love. God knew exactly what God was doing, and God was in control of the whole thing. *Good Friday* happened exactly the way God intended for it to happen, as hard as that is to imagine or believe.

The words of Jesus in John's Gospel keep echoing in my mind as I ponder the events of this day: [John 15:13 RSV] "*Greater love has no man **than** this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" We are His friends. This one phrase is a prayer worth reciting over and over on Good Friday: "*Greater **love** has no man **than** this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*"

Today started out as an overcast day which delivered a foreboding mood. This day did not happen to judge mankind or me. If that was its purpose, I would surely be found wanting. Rather, the opposite is the case. This Friday is a day of forgiveness. This Friday God made God's life on this earth as a supplication, once for all time for my sin and yours. This day I am freed from the bondage and chains of sin which have held me captive to my past. On this day the heavy weight and burden is lifted from my back and off my soul. This is why today is a good day. This is why they call it "Good Friday."

At St. George's, our cross is empty, and so would be our hearts without *Good Friday*. Our crosses are empty here at St. George's, because death did not conquer Jesus. God is not defeated on Calvary Hill. God is Victorious. God, 1000 points, to sin, zero! This is the March Madness!

So, TGIGF, because without *Good Friday*, we would be lost. We would be the losers! TGIGF, because of *Good Friday*, we know how much we are loved, like no one else has ever loved us in this life. Just who else has given their life that you should live? *Thank God its Good Friday! TGIGF! AMEN*