

Friday, April 10

GOOD FRIDAY

Matthew 27:31 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

Many years ago, when I was in my late 20s/early 30s I was asked to play the role of Jesus in a church's Easter musical cantata for four productions over three days (the reason I was chosen was because I had dark, long hair and a beard). I had no speaking parts; all my "acting" occurred at the end of the play when I appeared on stage, behind all the actors and singers, tied to a cross.

I had little rehearsing to do, and what little I did, I did dressed in everyday clothes. The evening of the first show arrived and at the end there I was in front of the audience and the cast, but this time I was in my "costume" – and, suddenly, the mood was radically different than the mood during the rehearsals. As I looked down on the scene in front of me, I couldn't distinguish faces because of the bright lights that were directed at me.

But, I could "feel" the intensity of the emotions from the entire cast who yelled at me, ridiculed me, and booed me. It was heart-piercing. Yes, I was only playing a role, yet the reality of the anger and rejection felt so real, I could feel my attitude and disposition changing. I was experiencing – in a controlled setting – the rejection of one who hadn't done anything wrong to those who were screaming at me. And I felt isolation, and it didn't let up during the next three shows. I was emotionally exhausted when it was over.

Please understand that Jesus' rejection was infinitely, incalculably, immeasurably beyond anything I could ever experience. And yet, that one microscopic droplet of mocking affected me to the core of my being.

The entire world rejected Jesus in real life. More than that, Jesus took upon Himself the sins of that world – past, present and future – that rejected Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Every Good Friday has special meaning for me. Not only because I am now a sinner saved by grace, and am a new creation, and "was blind but now I see." But, also, because I remember what it was like to be the object of, albeit acted out, derision.

I hope you are never on the receiving end of a crowd's unleashed anger and ridicule. Yet, I also hope you never forget that Christ endured the world's unleashed anger and ridicule for you so your sins could be forgiven and your hope and promise for eternity could be secured.

Christ's death isn't just a picture of God with us. It's also a picture of a God willing to stand in our place. Jesus Christ dies instead of us. He not only identifies with our suffering caused by our sin; He also enters into our suffering and makes it His own. He takes our sin and its consequences upon Himself so we can be free.

Romans 5:8 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

On the cross, Jesus lived out one last part of His teaching.

Love your enemies . . . Pray for those who persecute you . . . Forgive . . . In a powerful display of divine love, Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of those who rejected Him.

Trevin Wax writes, "When Jesus died, God took the accusations that Satan brings against us – all our failures and mistakes, our willful rebellion and our constant inability to keep God's law – and God nails those accusations to the cross of his Son. So Jesus Christ died there on Calvary, bearing your sin and mine; the accusations that should be hurled against us were hurled against him instead."

A group of Christian missionaries in India arranged to visit Mahatma Gandhi in order to discuss faith and the way to God. Before they left Gandhi asked them to sing one of their Christian hymns. "Which one, they said?"

He replied, "The one which best expresses the heart of what you Christians believe!" What an invitation, and what a challenge. What would you have chosen?

They chose, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

They were right! The Cross is central; at the very heart, not only of our faith, but of God Himself.

Take time this day to meditate on the decision Christ made to give His life for you and express His love that exceeds anything we could hope for or imagine.