

GOOD FRIDAY TENEBRAE COMMENTARY

How could this have happened? I mean, things started off so well, what with the angels singing and the shepherds marveling and the cattle lowing and all that great stuff. As we focus on the glory, it is easy to forget that the cross was already there at His birth, isn't it? Already then Herod plotted to kill him, murdering the Holy Innocents in his blind and hateful rage. Already then Joseph had to lead the Holy Family into Egypt to protect this unwanted child. The cross was already looming, even as the baby Jesus was nursed by His mother and, far from teaching and preaching, slowly learned to play with His toes, to crawl, to walk.

But, still, how could this have happened? What did He ever do wrong? He had no earthly possessions for others to covet. He never raised a hand and only rarely raised His voice. He was meek and gentle, poor in spirit and merciful. His stomach churned with compassion at the suffering of others. He spoke little that was not already spoken in the Scriptures and, even when preaching God's law, did it with a genuine concern for His hearers. How could this have happened? What had He ever done?

That is the problem. He's done everything. He's done everything commanded in the law. He's done everything His heavenly Father willed. And, now, most importantly, in dying, He does everything necessary for our salvation. And the world hates Him for it, because He does what they failed to do; He offers what they cannot earn. There are no more heinous words in the ears of sinful pride than, "*It is finished.*" I want a part. I want a role. I want some credit. But none of that here. He did everything. How could this happen? How could this not have happened after God had for so long and so often promised it?

There are some who contend that the teaching of the gospel is too easy, that it will only lead people to sin without guilt, taking forgiveness for granted, that it presents a cheap grace. But who could look at the crucifixion today and call grace cheap? How can anyone dare look at our dead God on the cross and call forgiveness too easy? Who can ever take in all the travesty of this day and find in it an excuse for sin? No, this grace is not cheap; it is the costliest thing of all. What those who want a part to play in salvation and who call the gospel's

grace cheap do not understand is that just because we did not pay the price for it doesn't mean it wasn't expensive.

See the high cost of sin today. See what sin does. Consider its wages. Sin often seems the easiest thing, the best bargain of all, when we are tempted, but its immeasurable expense is revealed today as it strikes our Savior's heel, pierces His hands, feet, and side, crowns His head, rends His clothes, and tells Him to go to the very place from which He's come to save us. Remember this day next time you are tempted. Remember this day when you esteem sin but lightly. Remember the cost of sin.

It seems almost grotesque to call this a Good Friday, doesn't it? What is good about it? The inhumanity of humanity is exposed for all to see. What we are capable of is broadcast for all posterity to ponder. The depths of our depravity are measured just to be pronounced incalculable. We kill our Creator. We scorn our Savior. We hate Love and crucify Truth. We fill heaven with wailing and hell with applause. How can we call this a Good Friday?

We can call today Good Friday because it unveils not only the cost of sin but the relentless determination of God's love, which pursued us through His conception, Egypt, the wilderness, the Jordan, all of Israel, and even death. God's love not only pulled God down from heaven, but now it raises Him up on the tree of the cross. God's love not only gave life to the humanity of Christ in the womb of the Virgin, but now it puts that humanity to death as she weeps at His feet. Yes, this is both the most terrible Friday and the best Friday at the same time, for we have a kindhearted God who embraces absurdity and takes hold of paradox, resolving it in the cross, reconciling it through faith.

This is most certainly Good Friday, for, while the cost of sin is beyond comprehension, the love of God is even more beyond our understanding. This is Good Friday, because what God started in the annunciation to the Virgin He completes in the crucifixion of His Son. This is Good Friday, because it is finished, He has done everything, and you now have what you could never have bought, earned, or bargained for: grace—God's undeserved love. Here, O sinner, is the ugliness of sin. Here, O saint, is the beauty of grace. Your flesh may tell you to turn away, but faith won't ever take its eyes off it. Amen.