

**PALM SUNDAY REFLECTION**  
**March 28, 2021**  
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***Mark 15***

*...Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.*

Returning to our old selves may be just months away. But for many people, the pandemic has changed everything. The return of something resembling what used to be appears to be finally within reach. but not for everyone. For many, the old life is gone forever, washed away in tragedy, requiring a reordering of life's daily routines and priorities. Look closer and you will see the truth. Everyone has suffered loss in some form. And all of us have shared horrific images up-close or on the nightly news—images emblazoned on our hearts any minds—

*An anonymous person in a hospital gown, hooked to a respirator, dying alone.*

The Passion of Jesus Christ. I wonder if we can, for a moment, take another look at the crucifixion of Jesus and put aside the things we might have been taught, and the interpretations we might have absorbed from modern popular culture. The crucifixion of Jesus is not some complicated theological exercise or some litmus test for who is or is not a Christian—it is not about *Jesus dying for your sins so that we can get to heaven*. The crucifixion is a pretty straightforward, historical event whose horror and injustice is emblazoned on the hearts and minds of God-lovers and those who wish to follow Jesus. Then, and now.

*Look and see what humans can do to one another.*

What humans will allow. What humans perpetuate. With a total disregard for all that is good for God and God's creation. All four Gospel writers know that the crucifixion is an event to be emblazoned on the hearts and minds of the Christian community. It is the baptism of the church—the old life gone forever, washed away in tragedy, requiring the

reordering of daily practices and priorities. St. Paul claimed that the heart of the Christian message is “Christ Crucified.” It was the image of the crucifixion emblazoned on his heart and mind—that dramatically changed the direction of his life. So I wonder, I wonder if we can, for a moment, put aside the things we might have been taught about the death of Jesus and the interpretations we might have absorbed from modern popular culture—in order to let this image change and shape us as it did for the early followers of Christ.

Jesus’ death was a brutal and violent attempt by the political and religious authorities to stop Jesus and the God-centered, world-transforming movement that he lived for. And died for. He wasn’t just killed, he was publicly tortured. Please save us from the spin that modern popular culture has given it—and that creeps in unless we *call it out!* Again, popular culture emphasis the Crucifixion as the way you can get to heaven. “Jesus died for your sins.” This diminishes the historical and ethical power of the crucifixion in real time—its horror and injustice. It diminishing its power to change and shape us—our ethical and moral responsibilities—what we live and stand for.

I’ve read that there is a notable uptick during this pandemic of young people applying to medical and nursing schools attributed directly to the horrific images we have all seen and to the heroic work we have witnessed by those in the medical field. These historic and ethical images have stirred hearts and minds and effected young people as they choose their life’s work. Images, emblazoned on our hearts and minds change us. Shape us. Help us to make the right choices—with new perspectives. There have been other images this year that have shaken us—and awakened us.

- Innocent children caught in the crossfire in poor neighborhoods.
- Desperate immigrants drown at sea, bodies washed up on the shoreline.

- George Floyd grasping for breath as he cried out for his mother.
- Non-white people, once again, victims of mass shootings

We really must wipe our mind's hard-drive clean of the popular culture's alternative interpretation of the crucifixion in order to rise up in the name of Christ, to stop violence and injustice. Here's what we need to delete:

- Jesus's death was not orchestrated by God as a substitute for the rest of us.
- Jesus death was not a punishment to satisfy God's wrath.
- Jesus's death was not a payment for our sins.

Jesus's death was the inevitable collision— the horrific consequence brought about by those intent on destroying any threat to their power and way of life. His death shows us what humans will do to one another. What humans will allow. What humans will perpetuate.

- Let the image of Christ Crucified, emblazoned on our hearts and minds remind us of *Jesus's passion for God and God's kingdom*,
- Let the image of Christ Crucified, emblazoned on our hearts and minds remind us of God's compassion and God's passion for justice.
- Let the image of Christ Crucified, emblazoned on our hearts and minds transform us and shape us—
- And let the image of Christ Crucified, emblazoned on our hearts and minds cast out all hatred and violence in our lives, that we may love and serve Christ in all God's people.

You see, if Christ didn't die for all of us, then he didn't die for you and me.

AMEN