

Today is Good Friday, the day we remember Christ Jesus' Crucifixion and how it leads to life, hope, and promise.

This might seem counterintuitive, though. HOW can crucifixion—death—lead to life, hope, and promise? Especially today, when we are in a post-truth age. Especially today, these days, when there is a large and growing percentage of the population who would prefer Jesus as he is today: Dead. Dead and buried. Devoid of life and hope and promise.

Curiously, Christ Jesus' **message of life** best begins with **his death**. Though we tell and retell the details of Jesus' arrest and trial and execution, these are not the details that truly matter. What matters is that Jesus is the Messiah and that he became dead, truly dead.

How things got to this state of affairs, how things got to this affairs of state, don't truly matter. Oh, these details are important to know so that we don't repeat history, don't hijack Christ Jesus' message for OUR own purposes. But really, what matters is that Christ Jesus was really and truly dead—not dead in suspended animation, not involved in an elaborate fraud, and not teleported elsewhere in spirit. Jesus was DEAD.

The temptation is to stop the story here, to dwell here, on Jesus' body, on what was done to Jesus. This is a human temptation; we are fascinated and horrified by death, by OUR death. By dwelling on the bodily aspects of Jesus' Crucifixion and death, we have a way of safely approaching the thought of our own death. Our brains can use Jesus'

horrific death to “try out” thinking about dying a death like Jesus died, resting in the psychological safety of knowing that the odds are we will NEVER die by Crucifixion.

Is this TMI, too much information? I think not, because WE NEED for Jesus to have died. We humans don't find it good enough for God to have come to us as a human being, if God hadn't subjected himself to the most basic and universal fact of human existence: We each are going to die someday. No, if Jesus had not died, he COULD NOT have been the Messiah.

Of life, hope, and promise, what do we “have” if the Messiah is dead? We don't have life: If Christ Jesus is dead and gone, so are we, eventually. If the Messiah had to die, this was God saying, “So, too, beloved, YOU must experience physical death. So, with a dead Messiah WE do not have life, but do we still have hope and promise?”

In our first lesson today, **the prophet Isaiah tells us the Messiah must die and tells us the promise a dead Messiah brings**. Isaiah called the Messiah, “[God's] servant” and he warned that [the servant] will be exalted for the death he will suffer. Isaiah said the Messiah will do this for us, will suffer death for us, to “make many righteous” by interceding for those—all of us—who stray from God's ways. ... I submit that this is the promise of God through Christ Jesus: To be with us no matter what life brings—to be with us in joy as well as in pain; to be with us in life and death and beyond: God with us always, even on Good Friday.

That is the promise of this day, the “good” in Good Friday. And if this were all, this promise would be enough, all by itself: GOD WITH US! But there is more today. **Our epistle lesson today reminds us of our hope.** The author of Hebrews says that by successfully enduring suffering, Jesus was “perfected” in his relationship with God. So, too, we therefore can be “perfected” through our own suffering and death, not automatically, but by “reverent submission to God,” not blaming God for pain and death but by thanking God for life even though death is coming to us all. Being “perfected” in God through Christ Jesus offers the hope of eternal life.

Our faith proclaims and our second lesson affirms—perhaps for the first time ever when it was first preached to the Hebrews—that Christ Jesus’ faithfulness in life and death made him “the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” Because Jesus dies today, we can face death too—a death of a loved one or even our own coming death. But how does Jesus’ faithfulness in life and death make him “the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him?” Jesus would need to somehow show us that death is not forever for our hope in life after death to be perfected. And this is exactly the “good” of Good Friday.

But I wonder HOW Christ Jesus will show us that death is not forever? ... To be continued this Sunday...