

## Whose Ways?

“My ways are not your ways,” says the Lord through the prophet Isaiah.

And nothing brings that message home more clearly than the journey we have just traveled.

This journey of participating in the passion of our Lord — in his crucifixion.

The question that this journey raises is this:

Why?

Why did the torture and murder of the Son of God happen?

How is it that we today so blithely and recklessly run our world in a way so obviously and totally at odds with the mercy, compassion and justice that God calls us to?

And the answer to these questions is, to my mind, the notion of original sin.

A sin that affects every human person as a consequence of being human.

Original sin is not about sex, as the otherwise wise Saint Augustine argued.

Instead, original sin is specifically defined for us by an even wiser author — the author of the book of Genesis.

She tells us right up front about the thing that got us tossed out of the garden of peace and harmony.

And what was it?

It's that we decided that we could know for ourselves the difference between good and evil.

That despite God's warning against seeking that knowledge, instead of trusting in God's faithful goodness toward us, which requires only our faithful obedience, we decided that we could know the difference between good and evil.

That we were never intended to go there is practically screaming at us through this journey we have just finished today.

Because the best political minds of Rome and the best religious minds of the Jewish faith conspired to torture and murder the Son of God.

Brilliant politicians and sincere religious leaders all conspired — in good faith and with a clean conscience — to torture and murder the Son of God.

So I suggest once again that the knowledge of good and evil is our original sin.

And if you're saying that's a load of malarky, just take look at any fight between siblings, spouses, neighbors or countries and the point will be proven to you over and over again.

Why?

Because in every dispute, each side believes to their core that they are in the right and the other side is in the wrong.

Each side consistently fails to remember the wisdom that when you have one finger pointing out at someone else, there are three pointing back at you.

Each side in every dispute believes they are righteous and correct and true.

So here we are.

A reminder on this grim and solemn day of how important it is to recognize that we stink at telling the difference between good and evil.

A reminder that we ought to approach such decisions with great caution and humility, recognizing that we may often be quite wrong, even if my wrongness is not immediately apparent at the time.

So, how did this happen?

How did we get to this place of dislocation from God's original dream for humanity?

That same wise author of Genesis tells us exactly how we got here.

It begins with the question that the snake asks Eve before that fateful bite is taken.

Here is that question:

“Did God say – that you would die if you ate the fruit?”

Those three words, “did God say?”, have come to define our central problem when it comes to faithfully following the path of God’s dream for humanity.

That’s because before that question is asked of Eve in the garden, she and her husband were living in faithful obedience to God.

Living in the flow of God.

Trusting that what God asked them to do and to be – and allowing God to be in charge of such weighty topics as who is good and what is evil.

But once those three words, “did God say?” were uttered it led our parents and us to question God, to distort God’s word, rather than stand in faithful obedience to God.

Everything unravelled, leading us to where we are today.

Allow me to explain.

When the early church got married to the empire, the question was always asked: “Did God say” that we are to love our enemies?

And our response was to create the just war theory.

“Did God say” that we are to lay down our lives rather than take a life?

And we devise all manner of schemes to impose capital punishment on those that we fear or judge to be evil.

“Did God say” trust in the Lord and God will provide for you?

And we respond by building economic systems that shatter the poor while creating a handful of billionaires.

“Did God say?” that we are to be peacemakers?

And we respond by dropping bombs on school girls in Iran, while insisting this war will force God to send Jesus for the second time.

“Did God say?”

Jesus died his bloody death on the cross in order to return us to our right relationship with God.

A relationship that doesn't ask “did God say?” — but rather stands before the word of God — in faithfulness and trust.

Thereby showing us that the task of the Christian is not to manipulate the word of God, but rather to stand before the word of God — and be embraced by it.

In all of its apparent foolishness and weakness and vulnerability.

When we refuse to do so, we end up torturing and crucifying the Son of God.

When we refuse to do so, we end up dropping bombs on schools filled with young girls all in our name, paid for with our tax dollars, justified by our leaders.

But if we can summon the willingness to simply stand before the word of God, in all of its simplicity and directness, then we have the chance to enter into the flow of life.

That flow that brings a peace which is beyond all understanding.

We practice standing before the word of God whenever we love our enemies.

Whenever we walk the extra mile with someone.

Whenever we forgive.

Whenever we release resentment and especially when we release self-righteous anger, because grudges and resentment do nothing to further God's way in this world.

"My ways are not your ways," God says through the prophet Isaiah.

So it is that Jesus brings all of humanity back to our intended right relationship with God.

No longer abandoned into the maze of the knowledge of good and evil; through Christ we can now simply stand before God's word, seeking to do and be all that God's word asks of us.

How do we do that?

Paul tells us plainly in today's second reading.

**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,**

who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death--  
even death on a cross.

As we move forward into this solemn and holy week, I hope you can be here for Maundy Thursday's Agape meal.

I hope you can be here on Good Friday.

Because it is during this holy week that so many of the joys and mysteries of our faith show themselves.

The surrender, the letting go that this week draws out of us, is a training ground for the rest of our year together.

That surrender looks like — allowing your feet to be washed.

It looks like — sharing a simple meal with beloved friends in a spirit of reconciliation and joy.

It looks like — sitting at the foot of the cross as we come face to face with ourselves as participants in the crucifixion of our Lord.

All of which prepares us for the most astonishing gift of all: the resurrection of our Lord, the first of many fruits to be made new.

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