

## **"Why?"**

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Let's join our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, as we reflect on why Jesus died for us on the cross, enter our hearts and deepest thoughts. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

A little boy was standing beside his father watching him trying to put a data disk into his computer. The father was having trouble getting the disk to go in all of the way. After a little while, the little boy said to his father, "Maybe it has a penny in it."

Sure enough, when the father fished around inside where the disk was inserted, out came a penny. The father tried again, but the disk still wouldn't go all the way in. The little boy said to his father, "Maybe it has lots of pennies in it."

We chuckle, but how do you praise the boy's honesty and also chastise him for wrecking your computer, at the same time? It's like today: how do we praise Jesus and also mourn his gruesome death, at the same time. How do we hope for the future of humanity and also despair the sin of humanity, at the same time?

Perhaps the most troubling paradox of all today is why today is called "Good Friday." There's one theory that the name *Good Friday* originated from the term, *God's Friday*, similar to the way that *Good Bye* originated from *God be with you*. But *God's Friday* is problematic too and doesn't help with why this is a "good" Friday.

Maybe Forsaken Friday would be better. Jesus' cry mirroring Psalm 22 that Terry read this morning, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" echoes from the cross and gives the experience of this day real human depth that we can identify with. The times we have felt forsaken, abandoned, alone. Our pain is real and our expectations of God are great on this Forsaken Friday.

Maybe Sad Friday would be better. Often, we try to focus on the good news and ignore the sadness and sorrows of life. It's a lot easier to move from the hosannas of Palm Sunday to the hallelujahs of Easter. But the experience of the people who watched Jesus die: the reality of evil; the reality of death that

overtakes us all; the reality of human despair and grief; the reality of sadness that punctuates our lives; are sadly, all things that we can identify with on this Sad Friday.

Maybe Difficult Friday would be better. The meaning of Jesus' crucifixion is difficult to understand. Is Jesus an unfortunate victim or the sacrificial lamb that takes away the sin of the world? It's difficult. What does God want us to understand? And even on Easter morning, why does Jesus still have the spear wound on his side and the nail holes in his hands? Does the risen Christ forever bear the wounds of his crucifixion on this Difficult Friday?

Many years ago, there was a classroom of young students that no teacher had been able to handle. Three teachers had quit in one year because of the unruly students. A young teacher, fresh out of college, heard about the class and applied to the school.

The principal asked the young teacher, "Do you know what you're getting into? No one else has been able to handle these students. You're asking for a terrible first teaching experience."

After a few moments of silent prayer, the young man looked at the principal and said, "Sir, with your consent, I accept the challenge. Please allow me to begin on a trial basis."

The next morning the young teacher stood before the class. He said to the class, "Students, I came here today to conduct school. But I realize I can't do it by myself. I must have your help." The young teacher told the class that if they were to have school, there would have to be some rules to go by. But he also added that he would allow the students to make up the rules and that he would list them on the blackboard.

This was certainly different, the students thought! One student suggested "No stealing." Another one shouted, "Be on time for class." Pretty soon they had ten rules listed on the board. The teacher then asked the class what the punishment should be for breaking the rules. "Rules are no good unless they're enforced," he said.

Someone in the class suggested that if the rules were broken, they should receive ten strikes with a rod across their back with their coat off.

The teacher thought this was pretty harsh, so he asked the class if they would stand by this punishment.

The class agreed. Everything went along pretty well for a few days. Then, unruly big Tom came in very upset and declared that someone had stolen his lunch. After talking with the students, the teacher came to the conclusion that little Timmy had stolen big Tom's lunch. Apparently, someone had seen little Timmy with big Tom's lunch.

The teacher called little Timmy up to the front of the room and little Timmy admitted he had taken big Tom's lunch. So, the teacher asked him, "Do you know the punishment?" Little Timmy nodded that he did. "You must remove your coat," the teacher instructed.

The little fellow had come wearing a great big coat. Little Timmy said to the teacher, "I am guilty and I am willing to take my punishment, but please don't make me take off my coat." The teacher reminded little Timmy of the rules and punishments, and again told him he must remove his coat and take his punishment. The little fellow started to unbutton his old coat. As he did so, the teacher saw that he didn't have a shirt on under the coat. And even worse, he saw a frail and bony frame hidden beneath the coat. The teacher asked little Timmy why he had come to school without a shirt.

Little Timmy replied, "I only have one shirt and my mother is washing it today. I wore my big brother's coat to keep warm."

The young teacher stood and looked at the frail back with the spine protruding against the skin, and his ribs sticking out. He wondered how he could strike that little back without even a shirt on. Still, he knew he must enforce the punishment or the students would not obey the rules. So, he drew back to strike little Timmy.

Just then, big Tom stood up and came down the aisle. He asked, "Is there anything that says that I can't take little Timmy's punishment for him?" The teacher thought about it and agreed.

With that, big Tom took his coat off and stooped over little Timmy at the desk. Hesitatingly, the teacher raised his arm to strike big Tom's back. But for some strange reason, on the first strike, the old rod broke in half. The young teacher buried his face in his hands and began to sob. He heard a commotion and looked up to find not even one dry eye in the room. Little Timmy had turned and grabbed big Tom around the neck, apologizing to him for stealing his lunch. Little Timmy begged big Tom to forgive him and thanked big Tom for taking his punishment for him.

Jesus took our punishment for us. Jesus hung on a cross so that you and I can have eternal life. We are forgiven and we are eternally grateful.

Maybe it is Good Friday. A good Friday to reflect on our feelings of forsakenness, our feelings of sadness, and our difficulty understanding the crucifixion of Jesus. On Good Friday, the people experienced God in Jesus and witnessed the anguish of rejection, the debilitating humiliation, and the excruciating pain experienced by God. God knows our feelings of forsakenness, our feelings of sadness and our difficulties. And God's response is a public demonstration of God's forgiveness of our sins, God's mercy and God's love for us, but first we must reflect for a time at the cross, and we'll gather together at the empty tomb for the Good News on Easter morning. Amen