

Good Friday

How did all this happen?

How could all this happen?

How does God let his own Son, the best person who ever lived, hang in agony on the torture rack of the cross?

Don't those questions sound familiar?

How could God allow the Holocaust?

How could God allow the devastation of the Japanese earthquake and the tsunami that followed?

How could God allow his wife, their child, to die of cancer?

The list is endless.

It is even the subject of the latest best seller.

A book by the prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi, the prosecutor who convicted Charles Manson. In it, he argues, as a good prosecutor should, that God is neither all-powerful nor all good, precisely because of the holocaust, because of the earthquakes, and the sicknesses and ills of the world.

And therefore, he concludes, Christianity is nonsense.

Tonight, even the most devout among us might be tempted to say: perhaps he has a point; as Jesus hangs on the cross, crying out: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

And yet, Jesus' words might not be like those we have uttered in despair.

When *we* ask why to all the suffering in this world, perhaps we are really saying: "if God were as compassionate, caring and powerful as I would be if I were God, none of this would happen."

But in Jesus' cry on the cross, we are led to see "that God is not like us at all. There is a vast difference between us and the Father."

Our limited understanding, "that God is like us: caring, compassionate, considerate, just more so, just doesn't work when we are face to face with God on the cross. We think that being God means power, power to fix things, complete freedom to do what we want to do, power to make the world work right for our benefit." Willimon, *Thank God It's Friday*, 44.

Yet here, face to face with God on the cross, we discover that our ways are not God's ways.

"God is the suffering servant, the one condemned to die like a dog between two thieves, the one willing to be hung up, and publically humiliated, the one who is willing to send the Son, to give the Beloved into our sinful hands, in order to have us as we are." *Id.*

"We ask Jesus to stand up and act like God, and he just hangs there. So we see that what we call God is usually some form of Pontius Pilate power – force, power, shock and awe, violent means for a host of supposedly noble but really selfish ends." *Id.*

God's ways are not our ways.

This night, the Father of Jesus is not in heaven, getting ready to swoop down and rescue him; to fix everything. Instead, the Father is with the Son, hanging on the cross.

They are in intimate conversation, the first and second persons of the Trinity. We cringe from the words "My God, why have you abandoned me" because we don't want to know that that's the kind of God God is.

"A God who doesn't always work the world to our benefit, the kind of God who, when it gets dark, doesn't immediately switch on the lights. Ours is a God who comes and hangs with us, on our own crosses." *Id.*

I don't ask you this day to understand it.

We aren't here to figure it all out.

Rather, let us, this night, simply pray, and adore, and reflect on this God, whose strength is found in abject weakness, who makes life rise up out of death.

+amen.