

Who is Jesus Christ? That is a question we have asked every week since the beginning of Lent. How should we answer this question on this day, Good Friday? That’s him over there: the one with the split lip and puffy face, the one with the black-and-blue eyes and blood-matted hair. Small wonder the prophet predicted that God’s Christ would be *“one from whom people hide their faces.”* We’d turn away too. We’d cover the eyes of our children. And we’d be in good company. Most of the people who knew Jesus in his lifetime had left him by this time and averted their eyes by the time Mark tells Jesus’ story in chapter fifteen.

Back in Mark 8, when Jesus asked his disciples, *“Who do you say I am?”* we’re told that the crowds were getting huge. Jesus had founded a movement that was taking off. He was a rock star. This continued right up until he started talking a lot about sacrifice and suffering and death. Then the crowds started to thin. Eventually all of his disciples abandoned him.

Jesus dies utterly alone. In the end even his Father in heaven puts a veil between the two of them. For the first time in all eternity there was a breach among the three Persons of the Trinity. For a brief time the second person of the Trinity was shut out.

Until he died. And then one unlikely man—a soldier at the cross—looked up and saw something more in the one hanging from the cross: *“Surely this man was the Son of God.”* And for the first time in Mark’s entire gospel, this public declaration of Jesus’ identity did not include a call for silence or secrecy. Up until now, if a demon or anyone else identified Jesus as the Christ, that person was told to keep it to himself.

But now it was safe to say it. Now that the true meaning of being the Christ had been revealed in the death of God’s own Son, it could be declared with confidence. This is where Mark has been leading us all along. This is the answer to everyone’s questions about who Jesus is. Don’t look away. Don’t hide your face. Uncover the eyes of your children. This is the Messiah of God. And although it isn’t pretty, his death really does bring life!

How is it that we have received this incomparable gift of life through one man’s death? These words of salvation from Paul’s letter to the Philippians help us to see how Jesus’ death brings life to the world: *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Christ, the son of God, has died for us and saved us from our sins on the day we call Good Friday. The dictionary defines “good” in this way: a) a general term of approval or commendation; b) suitable to a purpose; effective; c) producing favorable results; beneficial. One of the amazing things about Good Friday is that it was—and is—part of the “good” declared by God at creation. Genesis 1:31 says, *“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”* The fall was not good; sin, disobedience and suffering are not good. But God’s purpose in creation and the entire drama of redemption that ensued were—and are—good.

Some would put God himself on trial for placing such a burden on human life—that through the creation of the human race and giving us free will he knew the suffering we would experience. What is less noticed is how God always knew of Good Friday. In the rapture of creation, the cross loomed large. Yes, there would be suffering, but none more so than for God himself.

C.S. Lewis once wrote: “God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous creatures in order that He may love and perfect them. He creates the universe, already foreseeing – or should we say ‘seeing?’ there are no tenses in God – the buzzing cloud of flies about the cross, the flayed back pressed against the uneven stake, the nails driven through the mesial nerves, the repeated incipient suffocation as the body droops, the repeated torture of back and arms as it is time after time, for breath’s sake, hitched up. If I may dare the biological image, God is a ‘host’ who deliberately creates his own parasites; causes us to be that we may exploit and ‘take advantage of’ Him. Herein is love. This is the diagram of Love Himself, the inventor of all loves.”

What an ultimate “good” this must have been; declared at creation, fulfilled and consummated on Golgotha. But it wasn’t a good designed for God. There is no good to be added, or deficit to be addressed, in his being. It was a supreme good for us. At the very beginning of his account Mark declared that Jesus was the Messiah (Christ in the Greek language) and he stated that he was the Son of God. Chapter by chapter he related Jesus’ statements that he came to call sinners, to plant the seed of God’s word, to serve, to die and to rise again. He has related Jesus’ actions in casting out evil spirits, calming the wind and waves, walking on the sea, multiplying bread and fish, forgiving sins, healing the sick, raising the dead.

Mark, the writer of this gospel, devoted over one third of his book to the details of Jesus’ suffering and death because he wanted his readers to appreciate the significance of these shattering events as they fulfilled Jesus’ statement that he came to give his life a ransom for many. Jesus called for commitment and discipleship and he still presents each person with a choice—to follow Jesus and let him rule in our lives or to follow the pursuits of this world and in the end forfeit our soul.

Jesus called people to follow him, and in Mark’s gospel we read of the men and women of his day who did that. We examined the record in this season of Lent, and we have seen Jesus’ life and brutal death. We have heard his teachings and his received his promises.

But remember that one unlikely man—a soldier at the cross—who looked up and saw something more: “*Surely this man was the Son of God.*” And for the first time in Mark’s entire gospel, this public declaration of Jesus’ identity was not hushed or *identified him as the Son of God, the Messiah of God, that person was told to keep it to themselves.

But now it was safe to say it out loud. Now that the true meaning of being the Messiah was revealed in the death of God’s own Son, it could be declared with confident faith.

What is our decision about Jesus Christ on this Good Friday? Will we invite him into our life? Will we ask him to forgive our sins and become our Savior? Will we acknowledge him as Lord?

Will we say with the soldier at the cross, “*Surely this man was the Son of God?*”