

The account of Good Friday which we find in John's gospel is woven through with struggle. The struggle to define who Jesus is, the effort to demonstrate his innocence or guilt, the tensions of juggling relationships with Jesus against the opinions of others.

Everything we just heard takes place within one sunset-to-sunset day. The time in the garden, the arrest, interrogation, being taken to Pilate, questioning, mocking, condemning, crucifixion, death and burial, is all intensified in the context of the pending celebration of the Passover the next day.

The Passover is of course the remembrance of when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, when God spared the lives of all firstborn sons of Israel, while the firstborn sons of Egypt were struck down. Israelite families prepared a lamb to eat that night, and painted its blood across the doorway to the house according to God's instruction, as a sign that they were faithful people who listened to God. The lamb's blood on the doorway was an indicator to the angel bringing death, who would pass over those households and spare the firstborn son who lived there.

The lamb's blood redeemed the people. A story of struggle in exile and slavery, a people trying to be free, a people obeying God.

Now here is Jesus. The celebration of the Passover is the next day, so Jesus is being hurried through some semblance of proper order, being put to death quickly, so that it is over and done in time for the rituals to be observed.

The Israelite people are once again living under the rule of someone else, once again dreaming of freedom, once again asking God to save them. Their remembrance of the first Passover in Egypt was edged with hope that something would change. And here is the change, standing before them, being accused of blasphemy and worthy of death. God is among them once again, but unrecognised, unwanted.

It may be easy from our perspective to wonder how people couldn't see it, to wonder how Jesus wasn't seen for who he was. But a relationship with God is rarely easy to navigate. Our insecurities, fear, ego, selfishness, our human failings and pettinesses all get in the way. This has been true since the beginning. Even Jesus' disciples are no different. Peter is

defensive, whipping out his sword, and then scared, denying that he even knows the man he has given his life to following for the past years. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are secret disciples, not wanting their colleagues and neighbours to know that they respect this controversial teacher Jesus. The crowd gathered in the city has turned from Palm Sunday celebration and welcome to demanding death, clamouring for drama, whipped up into indignation. A relationship with God is so often sidelined by our humanness.

This is the reason that Jesus dies. The struggle to assert ourselves, our desires and powers and emotions, over relinquishing of power into God's hands. It is so hard to let God be at work. It is so hard to not be swept up into the struggle.

And yet, today, on Good Friday, here the lamb's blood once again pours out, a symbol of belovedness and life. The lamb's blood marks the people as holy, as set apart, as belonging to God, even in the face of rejection and violence.

Except this time the lamb is the creator, given willingly from a love so great it accepts death. And this time the blood pouring out is a sign for all people. Not a single

family, not a single firstborn son to be spared, but a whole world. A lamb who is God giving godself in order that death no longer holds power. A blood spilled in self-sacrifice because God loved the world so much that God gave his only son, that God gave his very self, the last lamb needed to mark each one of us as faithful children of our creator.

This is why Good Friday is good. Because the one who died was good. Because the love was good. Because it is an offering held out to all of us to be the beloved children. It may be a struggle at times, because we are all human. But the relationship with God is woven here into life, even as Jesus draws his last breath and dies. The lamb offers his blood for us all.

Amen.