

John Bonner
April 6, 2007
Good Friday

IT IS GOD'S DAY

For those who stood at the foot of the Cross on that Friday it seemed that evil had won and God had given over the world to Satan's way. What other answer could there have possibly been?

But more than any other Gospel writer John looks beyond the events to show how everything in the life of Jesus points to a *deeper truth*. This is Jesus' "hour" in which he is glorified and stands victorious over his adversaries. Instead of being a victim, Jesus is very much in charge of the events. In the midst of his suffering and humiliation, he is a figure of regal majesty.

In the extended Gospel reading which begins with the arrest of Jesus in the garden beyond the Kidron Valley it is night, but there is not mention of the agony of Gethsemane, as Judas leads the soldiers to Jesus.

John emphasizes the freedom with which Jesus acts. He knows what is going to happen and in telling the arresting party they 'fall back' in every way acknowledging the power of God and the place of Jesus in this scenario.

Two disciples follow Jesus in John's writing, not just Peter. The 'other disciple' is believed to be 'the beloved disciple' who is the writer of this Gospel.

Jesus is bound over to Pilate and John explains the real sense in which one may call Jesus king; "My kingdom is not from here" (18:36). Thus Pilate cannot find a case against Jesus. It is the crowd, the crazed ones, who drive the freeing of Barabbas, the gesture of amnesty by the state. Throughout the New Testament the civil authorities always rule in favor of Jesus' followers while the 'religious leaders' are the fault finders.

The crowd drives on in crazed stupidity while Pilate does what most politicians do, he thinks of his future, not the world's, and finds himself more and more disturbed at Jesus' responses. Pilate is told that Jesus should die because "he has claimed to be the Son of God" (19:7). Pilate is disturbed by this designation, and Jesus' response to him is that the only power Pilate can have over him is ultimately conferred by God (vv.8-11).

Finally Pilate gives in to his fear of Caesar's response if he were to give in to clemency for one who claims kingship. In Judaism's all time low point the religious leaders declare their loyalty to the emperor as their king, and Pilate capitulates completely giving Jesus over to crucifixion.

The irony of John's deep and pathetic writing is that it is really, throughout, the religious authorities and Pilate who are on trial. The arresting party will not enter Pilate's headquarters in order to avoid ritual defilement so that they might partake of the Passover lamb; yet they are plotting the death of the Lamb of God.

Pilate recognizes Jesus as 'King' though the Jewish leaders do not. Jesus continues to control the course of events as he carries his own cross to Golgotha. There is no fall or mention of help. There are no apocalyptic images of darkness and temple veils tearing in John.

John's depiction alone tells of how Jesus entrusts his mother to the care of the beloved disciple. Jesus would add that "I am thirsty" and after receiving the sour wine his last words "It is finished" lead him to give up his spirit. **THE WORK JESUS HAS COME TO DO HAS BEEN COMPLETED.** And now the Spirit will be poured out to the new community of faith, as represented by those gathered around the cross, those like you and like me.

God's sacrifice on our behalf is complete. Nothing more is required except your belief of God's love through the life of this one who would die for you. It is at the same time the darkest day in human history and the hoped for day of possible hope for a way out. Will humanities giving in to 'darkness' live on and conquer or will God's way prevail. Today and tomorrow it is the 'darkness', not just of the world but of our own heart and life, that we must consider. Is evil more powerful than God our Creator? Today all we can know is that evil is still a four letter word but thanks be to God, so is love. Amen.