

Good Friday, Year A
Reflections on the Crucifixion
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Bill Ellis

Most of the talk about Good Friday in Christian circles focuses on theology, what God was doing in and through the crucifixion of Jesus. It is therefore the story redemption, of taking away the sins of the world through a sacrifice made for us. Not all Christians talk about that sacrifice and that redemption in exactly the same way, but all, or nearly all Christians talk about sacrifice and redemption in one way or another. We have all heard that way of talking about the crucifixion of Jesus, and each of us has our own way of entering into that conversation and understanding what it means for us.

So this morning I want to approach this from a different perspective. Instead of talking about theology, what was God doing, I want to spend a minute talking about sociology, or perhaps, anthropology, because I want to ponder for a minute what we were doing, and by that I mean what the human beings who engineered his death were doing. The irony is that these people too were working on a sort of redemption, they too were trying to take away sins.

It is easy to imagine that the people who ordered the crucifixion of Jesus were either evil, or else forced to become complicit with evil. I don't believe that, not for one minute. Both the Roman and Jewish authorities had good reasons to

be worried about Jesus. He disrupted the lawful commerce of the Temple on the most politically volatile festival of the whole Jewish year, and in so doing led the Jewish authorities to believe he was a trouble maker and possibly a blasphemer, and the Roman authorities to believe he was seditious, possibly dangerously so. He was the sort of person that most everyone in authority, then and now, wants to get rid of, for such people are a threat to the stability of both the social and religious order. The hastily assembled consensus of opinion was that in order to save people from falling into sin, in order to prevent people from joining into some sort of general rebellion, Jesus had to go; he had to be sacrificed to save the people. And so he was. This is what I mean when I say that both God and people were imagining that this act was about saving people from sin, both saw it as in some way redemptive. And that says a lot about the difference between redemption from a human point of view and redemption from God's point of view.

From the human point of view redemption is about the vindication of one particular perspective. Humans therefore stand ready to sacrifice others for the sake of their own redemption. That is how we do it. From God's point of view redemption is about reconciliation with the whole world, with all people, and therefore God's action is one of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Both sorts of redemptive activity are ceaselessly in play to this very day, and this moment tells us how to tell them apart. Where people are willing to sacrifice others for the sake of their own particular cause, there we see the human attempt at

redemption at work. Where people are willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of reconciling everyone, there you see the influence of the crucifixion at work, there you see the hand of God.

As Christians, and more largely as human beings apart from any religious affiliation, we therefore always stand at the crossroads of redemption, and the same question is always before us. Do we believe in the human method of redemption or do we believe in God's method of redemption? The question is more difficult than it might seem, because although it may be settled in heaven, it is not at all settled yet here on earth; neither approach has triumphed utterly in the human spirit, both continue to work here, and of the two, the human method seems to be more popular.

I continue to pray that God's method of redemption will ultimately triumph here on earth as it has in heaven, and this morning, this Good Friday morning, I ask you all to join me in that prayer.