

John 18 and 19

What is good about Good Friday?

Today is Good Friday. In a normal year, like 2019, people go shopping, have fun meeting friends and relatives in parks and gardens and simply enjoy what is the start of a long weekend. Some take the opportunity to go on holiday and many visitor attractions open for the new season on Good Friday. It marks the beginning of the camping and caravanning season. It is a well-deserved Bank Holiday, but is this what makes Good Friday good?

If we go back to the first Good Friday, nearly 2000 years ago, we see a day that looks far from good. For Jesus, the events started with a painful betrayal by one of his disciples, one whom he had chosen to be among his close followers handed him over to the Roman authorities. Then followed a quickly put together trial which provided only a small semblance of justice: trumped up charges and false witnesses were brought in to testify against Jesus and in the end, he was sentenced to death. Before the execution was carried out, Jesus was mocked and humiliated by some of the Roman soldiers and the crowds who had cheered him with hallelujahs only a few days earlier, now demanded his death. Before the day was over, Jesus was nailed to a cross and suffered the most painful death imaginable.

For Jesus followers, the day was equally bad. It was filled with disappointment and despair. How could they have been so wrong. When entering Jerusalem on the previous Sunday, all had seemed so wonderful, so triumphant. Now hopes were dashed. Had it all been a mistake, following Jesus, giving up livelihoods and leaving behind family and friends? There was also the great sadness of seeing their master and friend die in such pain, being executed like a criminal. Grief and mourning could hardly start among a crowd who were looking out for any followers of Jesus, willing to have them punished as well.

Finally, there was Mary, the mother of Jesus, who witnessed what happened to the son she had given birth to some 30 years ago. It must be unimaginably sad and painful for any mother to see a child die, but here it was not a death by illness or in warfare. It was a public execution. Her son was not only taken from her, but had to go in such a disgraceful manner.

It was certainly not a good day, the first Good Friday. But events did not stop then. We have the great benefit of hindsight. Suddenly, things look different. The real meaning becomes clear. The readings from John 18 and 19 make it clear, that on that day prophecies were fulfilled and showed that Jesus really is the Messiah, the one chosen by God. It legitimised Jesus' claims and proved that He is indeed the one who prophets had announced, in some cases centuries before. Jesus is the true Son of God, the one to bring the perfect sacrifice and restore the relationship between God and humanity. The way in which the prophecies were fulfilled could not have been stage-managed by personal ambition but were only able to happen by divine will.

In this way, Good Friday deserves its name. If we look at what the implications are for us now, then that becomes even clearer. Because of Good Friday, we all can be forgiven and have new life. Now all people are reconciled with God. From God's point of view, humanity is no longer condemned but has access to a new way of life: restored and free from all the things that separate from God. As Paul says: we are no longer in condemnation. In baptism we have died with Christ, put the old behind and are raised in glory. Eternal life has begun – what great news.

What is good about Good Friday? Everything. It is such a momentous day with consequences that reach well beyond all imagination. The word "good" used to be synonymous with the word "holy".

Holy describes something that is set aside, is totally different from anything else. In that sense, Good Friday is a day that is totally different from all other days, past, present and future. It is the day when God intervened directly. Once and for all, the gap between humanity and God has been closed. That's why Good Friday is a totally good day. It is more than just "good" – it is the greatest day ever.

Of course, it is right and proper to focus on the price that had to be paid in order to achieve this. It is only right to reflect on the pain and suffering, to stay with that and not gloss over it too quickly. But in the end, because we look back with the benefit of hindsight and know the significance of what was achieved, we can agree that Good Friday is indeed a very good day which deserves its name and much more.

Who is there to condemn us? For Christ Jesus, who died, and more than that was raised to life, is at the right hand of God--and He is interceding for us. Romans 8, 34