

**Good Friday**  
**April 22, 2011**

Isaiah 52:13—53:12  
Psalm 22  
Hebrews 10:16–25  
John 18:1—19:42

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. By your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Atonement is a tricky business. Really, how can you fit the vagaries of existence under one roof? Innocent people are being used as pawns for despotic dictators. Needless suffering is rampant, whether it is from natural catastrophe or as the powerful sitting on surpluses of grain while children starve.

In chapter 17 of John, in what's called his high priestly prayer, Jesus prays that his followers might be one. He prays not only for his followers, but for those who will believe because of his followers. His words are fervent, and are matched by his march toward betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion that immediately follow.

The truth is that Jesus redeemed suffering. Made death holy. The truth is that Jesus brought God to the place of abandonment and ridicule.

Jesus prays with outstretched arms. Jesus accomplishes atonement with outstretched arms.

While we are at the highlight of John's Gospel, the ironies upon ironies hit us like a fighter whacks a punching bag. Among them:

- *Jesus seeks out Judas to be betrayed instead of the other way around.*
- *The armed Soldiers who come to grab Jesus in the garden fall down like dominoes.*
- *While Jesus is the one arrested, it seems like Pilate is put on trial.*
- *Jesus is paraded as King of the Jews while being beaten and wearing a crown of thorns.*
- *Über disciple Peter defends his teacher in the garden by slicing Malchus' ear, only later vigorously lying about being seen in the garden.*

On the tree that caused his death, Jesus brings a new way to life. The ones standing there, his mother and the disciple whom he loved, were joined together as never before.

True confessions: In John's Gospel, Jews are mostly portrayed as the bad guys.

True confessions: In the days where Christians were first listening to John, they understood that for aligning themselves with Jesus as Messiah, Jews were kicking them out of the synagogues. Jews were bad-mouthing Christians, so the portrayal of Jews in this late first century gospel gave it right back.

But what if Jesus intended warring factions to make peace with one another?

What if his mother and the disciple whom he loved could serve as an example to any hostile duo, forcing them to live with one another?

What if Palestinians and Israelis would take a stand toward an end to hostility, an end to violence, and seek to live peaceably with one another?

What if wherever there was conflict, enemies would join lives and carve out a new path?

How many deaths would it take?

Today, tonight, we tell the story and recognize that this one death was enough. One suffering is enough to end suffering.

Let us stand at the cross and look for Jesus wherever there is suffering, praying for atonement, participating in atonement, living as one community amidst a whole bunch of diversity.

Let us not look away from violence, but cry out against it.

Let us find the Spirit loose from Jesus' dying breath.

Let us linger in the garden, where the whole scene began and where it ends, looking for a tree of life, sprouting leaves of healing, gathering all nations under it, harboring refugees, finding lost souls, sheltering mothers and children, and bringing heaven to earth and earth to heaven, drawing all those in the throes of a dying world to a world redeemed, a world at peace, a world at one.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. By your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*