

"We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...."

-1 Corinthians 1:23

"The 'death of God' is viewed through the death of a human being. That death is real and widespread. If the death of God is the expression of a crisis in meaning, human death is the expression of a crisis in reality. It is not an experience of being orphaned or of a world come of age or of a Good Friday of the speculative mind, but a real experience of the death of the poor, the oppressed, the Indian, the peasant."

-Jon Sobrino

It is a popular practice to strip the Good Friday liturgy of interpretation the way we strip the altar of its cloths. Let the story of the Passion speak for itself, we say, and let us get out of the way.

A seminary professor once proclaimed on Good Friday that the only appropriate role for any disciple to play on that holy day is that of spectator, like the first disciples who watched warily from a distance. The irony, of course, was that the moment for such a message was the sermon. Even the spiritual exercise of gathering silently at the foot of the cross required someone to point us there.

Perhaps it is the minority opinion that Good Friday pleads for preaching. Nevertheless, I can think of no more important day of the church year to say something. The cross is a strange epiphany, and the silence of the preacher is bound to be filled with other, sometimes less than helpful interpretations. The cross is one of the most contorted symbols in all of Christianity. That it is the primary symbol demands that we speak a word that honors, and does not betray, the crucified God.

This is not meant to be a clericalist assertion of the preacher's authority. Any earnest reflection will do. The words need not necessarily be one's own – read aloud Countee Cullen's poem, "Christ Recrucified," or exposit Marc Chagall's "White Crucifixion," or center a womanist or queer reading of the cross.

Whatever we dare say on Good Friday, we ought to say it. For the sake of the God who scandalizes the world by wearing the skin of a terror victim, we ought to say it. For the sake of the crucified people who wear his skin today, we ought to say it. For the sake of having anything meaningful to say on Easter morning, we ought to say it.