



Dear Friends in Christ,

There is no surprise that Easter Sunday draws one of the biggest crowds of the year in Church. We are celebrating a great victory. It is so uplifting and hopeful. Everybody can use the encouragement of Easter. And I suppose it is no surprise that Good Friday does not draw a very good crowd. It is so sad and depressing. We crucified the best person who ever lived. The world is cruel and unjust. We already know that. What good can come from dwelling on the darkness of Good Friday?

Of course, the good from Good Friday is not in what we did to Jesus. The good in Good Friday is in what Jesus did for us. Good Friday was the ultimate battle between good and evil. Evil tried to conquer Jesus. Evil tried to recruit Jesus into the cycle of anger, hatred, and violence that has been running the world from the first generation. But Jesus would not surrender to evil. He stood up to evil, turning the other cheek, resisting the seduction of violence and standing for truth and love in spite of everything thrown at him.

We celebrate Good Friday not because of what we did to Jesus on the cross but because of what God did for us on that cross. God took the worst the world had and overcame it with love. Without Good Friday, Easter is just a beautiful spring morning. But because of Good Friday, Easter becomes the promise of God's victory over our sin and death. Good Friday is good because in the end God's goodness overcame human evil – not with violence and force but with love and mercy. Easter cannot have its full effect in us until we realize why Jesus was in that tomb to begin with. We put him there. Our sin is the sin of wanting to get rid of God. We are the God-killers. Easter is the proclamation that God loves us anyway. Hallelujah.

I think folks avoid Good Friday because they think they had no part in the crucifixion. But when we understand the Passion of Jesus, we realize that we are the ones who have betrayed and denied and abandoned Jesus. The hammer and the nails are in our hands every time we say to God, "Not your will but my will be done." We can't avoid Good Friday because we were there. We should alter the words to the old spiritual. Instead of "were you there when they crucified my Lord?" we should ask "were you there when WE crucified our Lord?"

Yours in Christ, Phil Nielsen

