

Good Friday 7 p.m.

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Christ Church, Middle Haddam

Isaiah 53; Psalm 22; John 19

He was a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

Had I not gotten up at 5 this morning, I wouldn't have seen it. Had I not been right there, I would have missed it. The sky was robin's eye blue. You know, when the weather is like this in CT, it's a foretaste of Paradise.. As I went for my morning run, I happened to glance up at the sky again, and it took a few minutes before I realized what I was seeing. I had to look up several times. There was a pinkish- red cross hanging in the sky: two intersecting plumes of cloud, or jet stream, who knows, backlit by the rising sun. A red cross in the heavens. Good Friday. Cross of blood, cross of shame, cross of sorrow, hanging in the sky above me.

Others have seen this sign. The Emperor Constantine, in the fourth century, terribly anxious before going into battle, rallied his men. Looking up to the heavens, they all saw a cross in the sky and heard a voice saying, "In this sign, you will conquer."

This sign has conquered the world, changed lives, destroyed addictions, reversed the course of events large and small.

Today we stand at the foot of the cross, watching Jesus bleed.

You know, in Scripture there are two places which are beyond the pale, two areas where no one good goes, where nothing good happens. One is the great garbage heap of Gehenna. That's where all the trash gets taken and burned. The smell there is awful, and vultures circle overhead. The other also starts with a G: its name is Golgotha, the Place of the Skull. Its smell is terrible, the stink of rotting flesh, and vultures circle overhead. That's where Jesus is right now. That's where WE are too.

Back to my jog. As I was running, and seeing this sign, I entered into one of these weird states that those of you who know me will recognize. They may look like lunacy to the rest of the world, but they are not!: they are the mighty workings of the holy Spirit. So I looked up to the sky, and suddenly I found myself saying, out loud, 'Take it, Jesus. Take it.' I held up my hands to the sky and pushed up. Luckily it was only 5 a.m., so it was safe for me to do this! But I had to then wonder, what was I asking Jesus to take?

All the little deaths that are within me. All the little deaths that are in each of us. Good Friday is the day when we stand not outside Gehenna, the garbage pile, but with Jesus on Golgotha, the Great COSMIC Garbage Dump. Good Friday is the day when we load our sins on him. And He WILL take them. He will take them away. Everything you've ever

done but are not able to name, everything you can't confess, not even to me or to Randy, your priests, sometimes not even fully to yourselves. The jealousies, the bitterness, the mistakes, the regrets, the missteps, the screwed -up family, the abortion, the drinking, the divorce. Or just that feeling that life didn't turn out the way you wanted.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that Jesus was a man mocked and scorned, ugly and disfigured, one whose face we'd it would sicken us to look at. Why is that? "He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed by our iniquities." He is disfigured because WE have destroyed his beauty, we have heaped our sins and failings on him. But that's okay. That's what we SHOULD do. That's how Redemption happens. "In this sign, you will conquer." Cross of red in the sky, blood on our hands wiped away.

Were we there when they crucified Our Lord? Well, we are here now. We are here today. And today is the day to release those little deaths, that pain, to send it up to the realm of angels and eagles, of signs in the sky. "And by his wounds we are healed."