

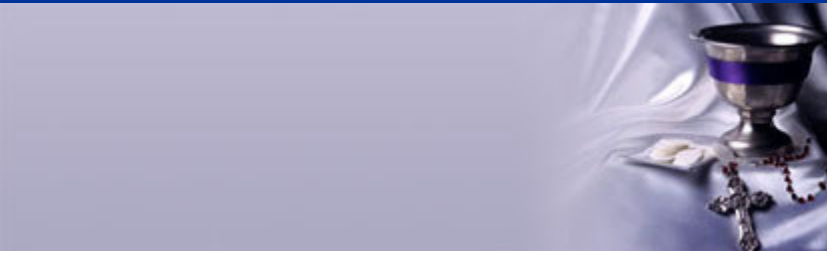
Prayer

Jesus, we will never fully understand the pain and shame you bore in our place. Thank you for paying the price so that we can hear the words, "Not Guilty!" Teach us God to live in that freedom. Teach us God to truly be ministers of reconciliation not counting the sins but declaring the good news of forgiveness and grace. Teach us God to minister to those weighed down in shame with the grace and honor that you have given us. The crowns we wear came with a price that we didn't pay. As ambassadors for you, help us God to joyfully bestow a crown on others without demanding they pay a price. Teach us to live in the fullness of your grace and truth.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to

Reflection on Good Friday

Not Guilty - Really?
April, 2009



Today is Good Friday but NightLight is closed today. The government announced last night that due to the protests escalating and the possibility of confrontation, today would be a holiday. The news shows mobs of the "red shirts" demanding to be heard as they seize certain parts of town. Most people have plans to travel home for the Thai New Year celebrations which start Monday. The tension is rising though and the mob is demanding sacrifice from the government.

2000 years ago, coinciding with another significant holiday a different mob stormed the government demanding a sacrifice. That sacrifice did not bring changes to the political systems but that sacrifice which we remember tonight has brought salvation, hope, and transformation. God has shown me so much about His grace and the power of the cross through the women at NightLight. The story I share with you was one of those powerful moments of revelation.



Guilty or Not Guilty?

My phone rang at 8 am. The woman on the other end was sobbing. "I struck my boyfriend with a knife." "You what?" I was sure I misunderstood. She repeated it barely getting the words out. "How could I do this? I love this man. He is a good man. I don't know how I could have done this." The boyfriend was badly hurt and had gone to the emergency room. "Tan" was distraught and thinking of suicide. I prayed with her on the phone and talked her into coming in to NightLight for more prayer.

When "Tan" came in she collapsed into the chair sobbing, her head down with shame, her entire body trembling. She shared how her gambling addiction had gotten out of hand. She had turned over her boyfriend's motorcycle to guarantee payment. He confronted her and as the argument escalated she grabbed a huge meat cleaver off the counter and struck him on the shoulder with it.

"Tan" had accepted Christ a few months earlier. Her very first time at NightLight she sat in a Bible Study with Jeff and when she heard that Jesus would forgive all her sins she was so desperate she interrupted and asked, "I want this guy. How can I get him."

Now, a few months later as "Tan" was sinking in a pit of despair and shame,

preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor."
Isaiah 61:1-3

this was the lifeline of hope she was holding onto.

We began to pray with "Tan." She was sobbing and desperate. I asked Jesus to reveal himself to her and bring His truth. All the sudden, "Tan" saw a bright light growing. Then she stopped talking to us as she was having a divine encounter.

A long time passed and "Tan" opened her eyes and exclaimed, "Annie! Jesus came to me. We had a long conversation. Jesus came and took me on a white horse. He put a crown on my head. He sang to me and I sang to him. I asked Jesus, why did I do such a horrible thing? How could I do this to the man I love? Jesus told me, "It wasn't you. You are not guilty" "Tan's" face was glowing. All the shame and despair was gone. It was beautiful!

But, wait a minute. She slashed her boyfriend with a knife! Not guilty? I expected Jesus to forgive her but to say not guilty? What about her other sins? The gambling addiction? Jesus, she's not married to the guy she is living with - wouldn't this be the perfect time to confront her on that? I mean - if she wasn't living in sin it wouldn't have happened right?

I began to realize how often I proclaim the message of the cross but somehow there is still a need to keep a record of wrongs and cross-examine. Its a lot easier to forgive once I'm sure the offender knows what they did wrong. Even after forgiving I still think of them as guilty. They are wrong. I'm just not going to hold it against them anymore. Somehow I failed to fully understand the message of the cross.

"Tan's" encounter with Christ is a beautiful expression of what took place on that Good Friday. "For he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed." Isaiah 53:5 "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their sins against them." 2 Cor. 5:17

Through Christ, "Tan" experienced the complete forgiveness and acceptance that she had longed for so desperately. Jesus, the King of Kings, who wore a crown of thorns came to "Tan" placed a crown of dignity on her head and pronounced her "Not guilty."

What amazing grace! What amazing love! What a Good Friday!

May God bless you abundantly,
Annie Dieselberg
NightLight