

The Ultimate Sacrifice – Jerome Evavold

There is so much that can be said on Good Friday, including the 7 last words Jesus spoke from the cross as he was giving up his life.

I want us to think about what that sacrifice means for us. What does it mean for someone to sacrifice his or her life for others?

Pastor Corinne Chilstrom, wife of the late Herb Chilstrom, former Bishop of the ELCA gives a moving illustration of sacrifice.

Here is the story. A 9 year old girl named Christina Green was always interested in how our government worked. She went with a neighbor to hear the speech given by Congresswoman Gabriel Giffords.

It was there at the mall that the gunman appeared. Innocent Christina was caught in the line of fire and was hit by his bullet. Corrine says, the death of this precious gifted child tore at our heartstrings. When her face later flashed on the TV screen, showing her beautiful smile and sparkling eyes, the reporter said her parents had donated Christina's eyes for cornea transplants.

Corinne Chilstrom was moved by this because she, herself, had to receive a cornea transplant to keep from going blind which turned out to be very successful.

She goes on to refer to the example when Jesus places his hands on a blind man's eyes and his sight was restored.

God breaks into our world in many ways. God had the power to change the world in a different way, but God knew it meant entering our world and becoming one of us and then giving up this life to give life to the world.

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Another example of sacrifice was that of the son of Pastor April Larson who served at First Lutheran here in Duluth and his dad Judd Larson who was interim pastor at Our Saviors here.

Their son Ben Larson and his wife, both students at Wartburg Seminary were serving a term in Haiti when the earthquake struck in January, 2010. Together with a cousin, they were working on a down town building when with no warning, the world around them began to shake.

Suddenly, they found themselves inside a collapsing building. His wife and cousin who were working in a different part of the building were able to escape. But Ben was trapped under the collapsed building and they were unable to get to him.

His wife, unable to get to him could hear him singing as he was dying under the rubble.

In writing about this, Pastor Corinne Chilstrom says, "How good to know that God is able to give us a song even in the midst of such pain? Then she shares this song:

My life flows on in endless song; above earth's lamentation.

I catch the sweet, though far off hymn that hails a new creation.

No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging.

Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear that music ringing.

It finds an echo in my soul. How can I keep from singing?

No storm can shake an inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging.

Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

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Those are two heartbreaking examples of sacrifice. They were no doubt devastating to their families.

Sometimes we end up on crosses we would do anything to avoid.

And tonight, on this Good Friday, as we imagine ourselves looking at the cross, we find ourselves looking in a mirror.

We are reflected in that mirror. The death of Jesus became an ultimate sacrifice. He underwent what is called the most painful death there is.

And we can feel his pain, as his words from the cross are repeated.

The First Word was "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO".

He is one suffering a painful death and yet he could ask for forgiveness for those who had put him there.

Who of us could speak those words?

The Second Word was a response to one hanging next to him who pleaded with Jesus saying, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom". The Word from Jesus was "TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE." Not a hundred years from now, but today. What a promise.

The Third Word showed how Jesus wanted his mother Mary to be cared for as he was dying. Looking around he saw his mother and his mother's sister and Mary Magdalene. When he saw his mother standing by a disciple he loved he said, "WOMAN, HERE IS YOUR SON AND TO THE DISCIPLE HE SAID, HERE IS YOUR MOTHER."

In the Fourth Word he shows his humanity as he cries out, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" He know doubt felt the

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despair and pain anyone feels when there are things like suffering that happens to us.

In the Fifth Word, he said, "I Thirst". Again his dying was awful and he felt the pain.

Finally in the Sixth Word, he says, "IT IS FINISHED". It was over. He was dying as the ultimate sacrifice given for the world.

In the Seventh Word, Jesus says, "FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT." When he said that, he breathed his last.

For now, it was over. Jesus gave up his life for the world.

He was taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb.

But as we know, this was not the end for Jesus or for us.

God's power would be experienced as he had promised.

On the third day he would be brought back to life again.

And what seemed to be an end would be a new beginning.

When a centurion, standing by the cross, saw what had happened, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent."

It was finished, for now, but thank God, it wasn't the end.

Easter is coming. Thanks be to God!