

Why Did Jesus Suffer?

- 557 It was no secret in Jerusalem
that the authorities were pretty much fed up
with Jesus of Nazareth.
They wanted him off the streets.
The deep motives will always remain fuzzy:
Did they fear his power among the people?
Did they have real problems with his theology,
believing him to be a blasphemer?
Were they looking for a scapegoat?
Did they think Jesus was associated
with some radical sect
with actual plans
to overthrow the government?
Were they jealous of Jesus' popularity,
especially among the poor
and lower classes?
Was one of them, a leader maybe,
gunning for promotion with Pilate?
Did they fear he would incite the Romans
against the local populace?
Whatever the motives,
Jesus seemed to know when it was time
for him to go up to Jerusalem.
He “set his face” in that direction.
The time had come.
- 558 Luke gives a poignant and revealing detail
about Jesus' own heart at this time.
As he was coming near the city of Jerusalem,
Luke tells us in chapter 19, verse 41,
Jesus wept over it.
“If you, even you, had only recognized on this day,
the things that make for peace!
But now they are hidden from your eyes.”

559 At the Liturgy of the Eucharist,
when we sing those memorable words
“Blessed is he
who comes in the name of the Lord!”
we join our voices with the poor
and ordinary people of Jerusalem
as Jesus entered the city
for the last time.

We must never forget that when the Gospel writer
put those words on the lips of the crowds,
it was not so much to give a biographical note
as to express the faith
of the community of the writer!

The Gospels were written after the resurrection,
which allowed them to offer more a theology
than a historical account.

560 But the entry into Jerusalem was triumphant,
as they told the story.
Jesus had come home to the city he loved.
It was the season of the Passover.

The Trial

595–96 Public opinion about Jesus
was sharply divided.
Even among the highest rank of Jewish authorities
were some who believed
and some who misunderstood him.
In the end, those who feared him
and considered him a blasphemer
and madman
won the day.

They handed him over to the Romans
under the charge of political revolt.

The Romans had a death penalty,
as many uncivilized governments do,
and Jesus was condemned under its rubric.

Who Is Responsible?

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There is always a temptation to blame someone
when events turn ugly.

Down through the centuries,
Christians have blamed Jews—
all Jews who ever lived,
including those presently alive—
for the death of Christ.

Then, having laid the blame at their feet,
Christians have killed Jews
or at least made them their enemies.

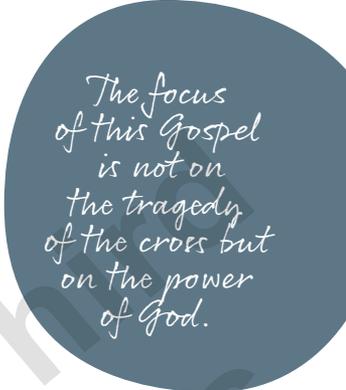
It's true that the Gospel of John
seems to vilify the Jews,
but the writer of this Gospel
had a particular goal and purpose.

John's entire account of the Passion
is actually triumphant!

There is promise in this death, according to John,
that all who believe will join him
in the powerful presence of God.

The focus of this Gospel is not
on the tragedy of the cross
but on the power of God;
to read it as a condemnation of Jews
is to misread it.

The great decree from Vatican II
addressing non-Christian religions
teaches clearly in article 4 that
“neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time,
nor Jews today can be charged
with crimes committed during his passion.”



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Changing Our Minds

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In fact, the goal of Jesus' life and death
was to restore us humans
to a proper understanding of God.
Jesus' goal was not to "change God's mind,"
nor was God's "goal" to cause Jesus' suffering
to appease his anger.

His goal was to change our minds!
But it seems that we humans
can be a hard lot to convince about God.
Jesus spent his entire ministry helping us see God
as near at hand,
as within our grasp.

Can we hear that?

Jesus spent his life on a campaign to change us,
to change our thinking
so we could see more clearly
who God really is.

In the end, for Jesus,
it did not appear very successful.
He went to his death abandoned by his friends
and feeling, at least in some accounts,
as though perhaps even God,
in whom he fervently believed,
had let him down.

But here in this setting, this man Jesus
reached deep into himself
and found the divine source of love
about which he preached.

Empowered by the energy of love,
never-ending love,
he refused to despair,
refused to give up his love.

His vision remained steadfast:
God is good,
gracious,



and trustworthy.
No matter what.
In this sense, God leads us here,
and God opens our eyes once again.
opens our ears
and opens our hearts to love.
Jesus taught us to practice a unique kind of love:
self-emptying,
self-giving love.

GROUP OR PERSONAL PROCESS

Why do we humans tend to blame others when things go badly?

Why do we blame God at times?

Looking back over the material in this part of the lesson, tell the story of Jesus' passion in your own words.

In your own words, what did Jesus accomplish through his suffering and death?

Jesus' death opened the doorway to God's mercy and forgiveness for us. What is your experience of this compassionate God?