

## LOVE THAT REFUSES REVENGE

On Good Friday, John's Gospel invites us to sit with the wounds of betrayal, injustice, and the cross, and to hear a counterwisdom: love that refuses revenge. John gives us more than just a sequence of events, he also gives us a discipline of the heart. It is a discipline that teaches us to lay down the impulse to retaliate when we are harmed and to mirror a love that is stronger than vengeance. The chaos of Palm Sunday has become grief and a wonder of 'what's next?'

The night begins with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, a moment of deep tension where human fear and divine resolve meet. When Judas arrives with soldiers, Peter reacts with a sword, cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus immediately averts violence, rebuking Peter and healing the cut ear. This small scene holds a larger truth: the kingdom of Jesus runs on a different energy than our human instinct to strike back. John's gospel emphasises that the one who swings the sword ends up resisting God's path. Love, not retaliation, is the arms bearer of this story.

As Jesus moves from the garden to the praetorium, or Pilate's residence, he endures the corridors of political and religious power, where accusations fly and "justice" is flavoured by bias. Here, revenge often masquerades as order: the crowd is stirred to demand crucifixion, Pilate's fear of losing authority successfully tempts him to wash his hands of what's happening. Yet in every moment, Jesus embodies a divine non-retaliation that surprises both his accusers and his followers. He speaks truth without vindictiveness, asserts his kingship not through coercion but through a vulnerable truth-telling that remains faithful to God, his

Father. In this crucifixion narrative, revenge would have been easy—returning evil for evil, calling down judgment on the deriding soldiers, or unleashing a power that could force a change in the crowd. Jesus does none of these. He bears the suffering with a love that holds its ground in the face of mob led hatred.

The most piercing moment comes on the cross. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” Jesus prays. Even as those who harm him gamble for his garments and mock his claim of kingship, love speaks a radical forgiveness. John’s gospel doesn’t minimize the pain; it magnifies the mercy. The cross is not a victory of violence over violence but a triumph of self-giving love over bitterness. In Jesus’ forgiveness, we are taught that to love like him is to refuse the urge to repay injury with injury, to resist the corporation of grievance that binds hearts in cycles of harm. Jesus gave his life so that we may have life. He paid our ransom, through his blood on the cross.

What might it look like to live out this kind of radical love in everyday life, especially when we are wronged or feel endangered? Good Friday is for us an invitation from Jesus to us to live differently to the secular world which works closely with the thought patterns of getting even:

When you've been wronged, acknowledge your pain but don't let it take over your life. Jesus models this by bringing his suffering openly to God. Similarly, we can share our hurt with trusted friends or with God, allowing ourselves to process it without letting bitterness shape who we are.

Opt for non-retaliation as intentional self-control: avoid escalating conflict, spreading gossip or revenge, and seeking payback that harms others or yourself.

Perhaps look at mercy as a discipline rather than a sign of weakness. Forgiveness isn't a onetime feeling but a habit formed in small moments: offering grace when a slight is felt, praying for those who oppose us, choosing to bless rather than blame.

A word we use a lot in our faith is trust. Trust the sovereignty of God over outcomes. Jesus trusted his journey to the cross to God even as the crowd condemns him. Our longing for justice is real; our confidence in God's ultimate justice is deeper. We can act justly and love mercy while leaving the final outcome to God.

Love that endures violence begins in small wounds of the heart. It grows as we refuse to let bitterness mold our days, choosing, instead, to cultivate and nurture our compassion, patience, and empathy toward the very ones who harm us or fear us.

Remember the cost of love. Jesus doesn't gloss over the cost of choosing mercy. The cross is the cost of loving so deeply that it becomes costly for us to remain angry. Our own relationships may require a similar costly generosity: letting go of pride, seeking reconciliation, and *choosing* to see the humanity in those who harm us.

John's account of Jesus before Pilate and the crucifixion shows that the path of discipleship involves a reorientation of power. The one who whispers words that heal, who refuses to retaliate even when power is within reach, holds the true rule of the world through love. Today as come together for Good Friday, we are invited to place our own longings for revenge under the magnifying glass of this mercy. If we ask Jesus to teach us to love as he loves, and forgive as he forgives, we are asking for a transformation that changes not only how we respond to harm but how we envision power, courage, and justice.

As we reflect on the passion, let us hear the invitation to imitate a love that does not retaliate but redeems. Let forgiveness be our daily practice and let mercy be the language by which we speak to a world tempted to pay back harm with harm. In a season that marks the deepest costs of love, may we discover that the most powerful response to those who wish us harm is a love that forgives, a love that serves, and a love that, like Jesus, desires not revenge but repentance, healing, and reconciliation. This is the heart of Good Friday: a love strong enough to absorb hurt, and brave enough to hope for a new life even for our enemies.