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## *What Kind of Jesus Do You Need?*

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**The Cathedral of St. Philip**  
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When I was a child, there were few words that got my attention more quickly than, "Elizabeth Marie Clemmer, come here." I don't need to tell you, this was never a call to celebration. It was a call to an accounting. Why had I left something in a place it had no business being left? Why had I failed to attend to an assigned task? Why had a neighbor seen me a place I had no business being?

When I heard the call, I got to wherever my mother was, on the double, with my stomach firmly lodged in my throat. I hated being in trouble. I tried to do whatever I could to avoid it. I learned quickly what things appeared to be most important to my parents, my teachers, to all in authority, so that I could hit the mark. If I hit the mark, I was good. I was worthy of love. If not, I was separated, defective, and needed to get my act together.

Once I was in trouble, I did everything I could to get out of it. I apologized. I tried to correct the mistake. I wanted to somehow pay my way out of this terrible feeling of failure and disappointment.

I vividly remember one occasion where I messed up. I had fought with my mom. I couldn't even tell you what I did or what we fought about. But I remember how I felt. I remember being terrified that somehow, I had to fix this feeling in my stomach. There had to be a reconciliation. And then I did something rather strange.

I took a 3x5 note card, scrawled a note of apology with a blue felt tipped pen on it.

Then, I taped two quarters to the card, and left it on my parent's bed.

This makes no sense to me now.  
It makes all the sense in the world to me now.

I was not raised in a religious tradition that reminded me of my sinfulness. I was always told of a loving God. I was certainly never told that I needed Jesus to pay a debt for me because I was so sinful. My parents never said their love for me was predicated on perfect behavior.

But deep down, I was worried. Two quarters taped clumsily to an index card, somehow symbolized my impression that I had to pay my way back into being loved.

We come to Good Friday from many places, with many needs. But I suspect many of us share a question. Who do we need this Jesus to be for us? What salvation is being offered to us on the hard wood of the cross?

Do we need Jesus to be someone who shares our despair? The Jesus who humanly cries out in the garden for his suffering to be taken away? Do we need Jesus to be someone who has been shamed and mocked on the cross? Do we need Jesus to be someone who offers comfort to those who are being crucified alongside him? Do we need Jesus to be someone whose crucifixion causes the sun to darken and the earth to shake?

Who do we need this Jesus to be? Today, at the hour of his death.

For a long part of my journey these were the elements I was most aware of needing. It was how I could make sense of my own need for Jesus as Savior. I needed Jesus to be able to understand the depths of my own humanity and be so radically affiliated with it that this would be raised up into the life of God. No matter how far away God felt, through the mediation of this Jesus, those human needs would be known and honored.

This picture of Jesus still comforts me when I come up against my own despair and limits.

It is an important Jesus for us to need. It is the Jesus we are given in the passion accounts from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

But those are not the needs we have met on Good Friday. The Gospel of John doesn't give us any of that. Instead, John gives a Jesus that perhaps we don't even know we need.

The Jesus who comes to us today has had any notion of "relate ability" stripped away. We cannot take this passion account, look at this Jesus and then discern some practical advice for how we should approach our own suffering.

But that is a gift. While we need Jesus to be connected to our humanity, we can never leave it at that. We need Jesus to transcend our own potential and offer us something else in its place. We need this Jesus, the Christ to turn our world upside down.

When the world is turned upside down, we see the victory that so strangely comes through death. That God --- in and through the Jesus of Good Friday has offered us an abundance of love. A love we can never measure.

The love that is offered on the cross is not something we can calculate our share of. We cannot pay for it on a 3x5 note card with coins and scotch tape. It is stronger than any cry of suffering or more powerful than the strongest earthquake.

It is an act of such purity that it forever wipes out the measures we can imagine. It is pure gift.

We have it from our birth. It takes more than a lifetime to appreciate. But it has been given. And it comes to us today. It comes to us on Good Friday.

Amen

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