

It happened about 16 years ago. The Good Friday evening service had just ended when Mike Morrow came to find me. "Would you come talk with us for a minute?" What I found, in the hallway outside the sanctuary door, was Kate trying to comfort their sobbing four-year-old son. She said, "Willie is really upset because Jesus was a good person, but he was killed. Can you explain to him why that happened?"

Let me tell you, people, there are some things that wearing a priestly collar does not prepare you for. My first thought was, "So much for people who think we shouldn't give communion to little kids, because they don't really "get" what's going on." My second thought was, "I don't even believe in the various theories of atonement that try to say why this happened. So how could I explain it to a four-year-old?"

After all these years, I don't remember exactly what I said to Willie, although he did calm down, and maybe I didn't completely destroy his faith. But I do know that I still don't have an answer to the question. Jesus had told his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem where he would be put to death. But he did not explain to them why this was going to happen, why he couldn't simply avoid Jerusalem and what awaited him there.

I wonder if sometimes when we raise a question with God such as 'why do you do things this way', we are like children trying to take apart a complicated machine to see how it works. Our branch of human development, *Homo sapiens*, seems to take seriously its scientific name – the wise species. We wish to know all, have our hands on the controls of all. And yet all our possible answers to why God's son was sent to die on the cross seem insufficient and possibly irrelevant.

I think about Jesus' last night. As he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and wept tears that were as bitter as drops of blood, did he know why it was God's will that he let go of this sometimes beautiful world he had served, leave behind the people he had loved and wept over? The scripture doesn't say anything about this. It says that after his deep struggle, Jesus told God that he gave himself in trust to the will of his Abba, and was ready to face what was coming.

So what if the question of 'why' is not the really important one? What if the deeper question is 'for whom'. And here at the heart of the story, we are given an answer.

When Jesus breaks the bread at the Passover meal, he gives it to his disciples and says that it is "...for you." The cup of wine is his blood poured out "... for you." More important than a reason 'why' Jesus died is his own declaration that it was 'for you' ....for us.

We need to recognize that this gift is not given to good people. If we think about the story of that terrible and wonderful night, we should remember who Jesus said was there with him: "But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table." That one also was fed with the bread of life.

Immediately after dinner the disciples began squabbling about which of them was to be seen as the greatest. Jesus may well have longed for them to have known after three years of his teaching that in God's new Kingdom, "...the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves." But even in their inadequacies and limitations, all of them were given the cup of this new Kingdom in his blood.

Every disciple would abandon him to his lonely prayer in the garden, and one of them would deny that he had ever known him. But although Jesus had foreseen that this would happen, he had fed them all with his body and blood poured out precisely for them. This is about pure unearned love; love with no bottom line; God's immeasurable love coming to us, made visible for us through his Son.

We too, the current generation of disciples who try to embody the Kingdom, are less than perfect. In fear of losing the good things we receive from the status quo, how often do we betray Jesus? In our not uncommon desire to be important people, have we not ignored what our Lord tried to teach us about the Kingdom hierarchy? In the day to day demands of the world, have we not at times denied knowing him; fallen asleep when we should have remained present in prayer?

So perhaps when we receive at the Eucharist, we should hear more than the familiar words, "The body of Christ, the bread of heaven.,,,The

blood of Christ, the cup of salvation.” Perhaps we should hear the deep story. “One of you will betray me. This is my body given for you.” “One of you will deny me. This is my blood poured out for you.” “You will fail to watch with me in my darkest hour. My body and blood given for you.” Feeding us in all our weakness and our need, this crucifixion, this resurrection is for us.