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## *Good Friday: A Friday to Choose the Good*

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler  
Good Friday**

When congregations everywhere read the Passion Story during Holy Week, we often assign parts to different readers. And there is always a part called “the crowd,” which is always the congregation itself. Thus, it is always the congregation itself who is assigned to shout the words, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

It can be uncomfortable. So, there is always someone who says, “I don’t want the congregation saying, ‘Crucify him.’ I should not be saying that!”

A few weeks ago, I wrote and distributed an article whose title was simply, “People are Kind.” My words were a reflection upon a particular walk I had taken, along the river, where the kindness of the world struck me in a beautiful way. I reminded readers that people are kind.

I knew some people would appreciate the reminder. However, I also knew that there would be a negative reaction, and there was. The negative reaction was, “No, that’s not right. People are not kind at all. Listen, for instance to what happened to me one time. Or, listen to what no good stuff happens to me, all the time.” And so the reaction went.

I stand by my original declaration: People are kind. However, today, Good Friday, is the opportunity for legitimate rebuttal. There is a legitimate rebuttal to the proposal that people are kind, and that rebuttal is the phenomenon we call Good Friday, remembering the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

People are kind, yes. However, people are unkind, too. People can be unkind. Indeed, it is often the same people who are kind who can also be unkind.

Judas Iscariot was presumably one of the well-intentioned followers of Jesus. He was presumably one of those who said he had given up everything to follow Jesus. He turned into a betrayer. The Apostle Peter, good old Saint Peter, was doing everything he could to help Jesus, until things became tense. Peter was presumably a good man, and he turned into a denier of Jesus.

We, ourselves, who prefer to think of ourselves as kind and good, can be unkind. We may want to be good, but Good Friday is the day to become aware of our unkindness and our ungood, too. Good Friday is a good day to remember how we, all of us, are not good. The same people can be both kind and unkind.

It takes a still deeper measure of goodness, and kindness, to acknowledge that both good and evil can be in the same person. The faithful among us, the self-aware, can acknowledge this contradictory truth.

People are kind. The rebuttal is that people are unkind, too. Good Friday presents that dilemma.

However, today also presents a rebuttal to the rebuttal! Okay, people are unkind. But some people, the stronger people, continue to be kind. Okay, people can be violent. Of course. But some people, the stronger people, continue to be non-violent and good.

I am no big fan of Hollywood, though I enjoy many of the movies and television shows that emerge from that industry. I am no expert on the stars and personalities. But I do know that the comedian, Chris Rock, for instance, can be snarky and edgy. Even so, I have had occasion to enjoy his humor.

I mention him, strangely, with an admirable light today. During the Oscar Awards Ceremony a few weeks ago, his resilience and restraint from violence was exactly the kind of example I mean today, an example of right being stronger than wrong. One man was attacked by a second man, right on live television, and the first man did not strike back. That restraint took strength and wisdom.

Who knows why the second man resorted to violence? He has been enormously popular and respected! Who will ever know why? Well, the truth is that both kindness and unkindness exist in the world, and sometimes they exist in the same person. Right and Wrong can exist in the same person. Good and Evil can exist in the same person.

Today, we remember a day over two thousand years ago, when a good man was struck, repeatedly and repeatedly, and did not strike back. His own followers, one by one, turned away from him. And Jesus Christ did not strike back with either violence or anger.

Thus, the power of Good prevailed that day. Good Friday is the day that the power of the Good prevailed. Among the followers of Jesus, too, there were examples of the Good: the women who wept; Simon of Cyrene carrying a cross; the established leader, Joseph of Arimathea, who was willing to be known as disagreeing with the action.

These were the instances of the Good, which kept burning a spark of light and righteousness in the world. There is kindness in the world. There is light and righteousness in the world, even on Good Friday. Yes, some throw stones; but some carry the cross.

This contest between Good and Evil can be quite close, quite competitive, especially inside each one of us. We do good, on this Good Friday, to realize how close each one of us is to goodness, but also to ungood. It is that very awareness that can help us choose restraint when we are tempted to strike, to choose quiet when we are tempted to shout out. We can choose to be the first man on that Oscar awards stage, or we can choose to be the second man. And our choice can change the world.

This choice was well described by the extraordinary Jewish physician and Torah scholar, Maimonides, in the twelfth century. He understood well the dilemmas of human nature; and he believed that even flawed humans—that is, all of us—are capable of taking action that will impact society for the good.

“Every person,” he wrote, “needs to see himself all year as if he is equally balanced between innocence and guilt. . . . If he does one mitzvah, behold he has tipped himself and the entire world to the side of innocence and brought about salvation for himself and for [everyone else]”. (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Teshuvah 3:4*)

In other words, “One should see the world, and see himself, as a scale with an equal balance of good and evil. When he does one good deed the scale is tipped to the good – he and the world is saved. When he does one evil deed the scale is tipped to the bad – he and the world is destroyed.” (Maimondes).

On Good Friday, in the midst of brutal evil, Jesus chose the Good. Jesus tipped the scale to the Good. And that choice changed the world.

AMEN.