

Meditation for Good Friday (April 3, 2015)
Offered by Nathan Ferrell at The Episcopal Church of Saint Mary

Texts: Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12; Psalm 22:1-11; John 18:1 – 19:42

Title: Why Did He Do It

Why? Why did he do it?

No one forced him.

It was his choice. At least as far as we can tell.

So why did he do it?

Isn't that the question that we are always asking?

We can never truly know why people do what they do. Or even perhaps why we ourselves do what we do.

Since the days of his Passion, there has been a continuous stream of theories attempting to explain why Jesus went to the cross, why he seemed to choose this path, or perhaps even why God intended for this awful thing to happen.

“Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

Why did he do it?

Since that first and original Holy Week, there has been a steady stream of ideas about why Judas betrayed his friend, his Master. Was he jealous? Angry? Greedy? Did he love Jesus? And if not, why then did he give up three years of his life to follow him around? What was Judas trying to accomplish?

Why did he do it?

Since last Tuesday, March 24, there has been a continuous stream of conversation about why Andreas Lubitz crashed that Germanwings jet into the side of a mountain

in the southern Alps. Was he ill? Unhappy? Depressed? But didn't he love to fly and dream his whole life of being a pilot?

Why did he do it?

We can never truly know why people do what they do. The inner workings of the human heart are opaque to our insights, but visible always in the presence of God.

It is not for us to know. We see only the fruit of actions taken.

And we all tend to under-estimate the effect that our choices make.

What is the power of one person's choice? What effect can the choice of one person have upon others?

Andreas Lubitz made a choice, compelled or not. Judas Iscariot made a choice, compelled or not. Jesus of Nazareth made a choice, compelled or not.

Some choices we make bear an abundance of fruit – for good or for ill.

Why did he do it?

Perhaps we'll never know, and perhaps it does not matter.

Saint Francis of Assisi had an idea about why the Lord drank this cup, why he faced this death.

Maybe you share his interpretation. I happen to think that it's a good one.

Francis offered this prayer which is far beyond the reach of most humans, beyond my reach to be sure, but I'm drawn to it nonetheless.

Near the end of his life, Francis prayed in these words:

"O my Lord Jesus Christ, I beg you to grant me two gifts of grace before I die.

First, in this lifetime, let me feel in my heart and in my body, as far as it may be possible, that pain which you, O gracious Lord, suffered in the hour of your most bitter passion.

The second is that I may know in my heart, as far as it may be possible, that overflowing love with which you, O Son of God, were enflamed enough to willingly bear such pain for us sinners. “

Can you imagine the kind of feeling and desire it takes to pray like this?

I want to feel it, Lord. This is what he prayed.

I want to feel the same things that you felt on that Friday.

And I want to feel the same devotion and commitment that would not allow you to turn back and save yourself.

Strange as it may sound, Francis was filled with compassion for Christ, who is the Compassionate One. After all, what is the definition of compassion?

It goes like this: “Deep awareness of the suffering of another accompanied by the wish to relieve it.” Deep awareness. Deep awareness of the suffering of another.

Imagine yourself longing for and desiring that awareness above all else.

So why did he do it? Perhaps we’ll never know with certainty.

But each one of us will decide how we will interpret his action, interpret the cross.

Why not, my friends, see the Lord’s passion in the same way that Francis saw it?

Why not make yourself vulnerable to the suffering of Jesus? Why not allow your heart to be broken like his? Why not ask for the overflowing love of God to fill your heart until you know – in every cell of your body – the compassion of Christ? Why not?