

**The Way of Transformation**  
**Good Friday, 2016**  
*John 18:1 – 19:42*

The Gospel reading for Good Friday tells us the story of a Jewish man who was rejected by Jewish religious leaders and then crucified by Roman soldiers – and in re-telling this story, we have heard the words **Jew, the Jews, and Jewish** twenty times.

This Gospel was written in the late first century, by a Jew, for a community of Jews – and when the author wrote *the Jews* he meant other Jews who didn't follow the Way of Jesus. But in the centuries since then, this story has almost always been read by people who were not Jews, and told to people who were not Jews –who usually heard that *the Jews* were *the Enemy*.

This is how blaming, scapegoating, violence and hatred are perpetuated in human communities. A hard life is much easier to bear when it's someone else's fault.

This past week, terrorists attacked Brussels, a few months ago it was San Bernardino, and before that it was Paris. These young men (and some women as well) came from communities where hatred and violent retribution have been nurtured for generations.

When we arrived in Beirut, Lebanon in the 1960s, the city was already surrounded by camps of displaced Palestinians, exiled from their homes in 1948. By the time we came to live there, the great-grandchildren of those first refugees had been born in the camps around Beirut. Those children, and their children, and their children, grew up without citizenship, without jobs, and without hope.

There are now generations upon generations of oppressed peoples around the world, and not just from Palestine. Imagine the anger, the despair, the hatred that comes to children growing up without hope. And now imagine being told again – and again and again – that someday it would be your mission to destroy the oppressors of your people.

Jesus himself grew up under Roman oppression, yet he was not taught to nurse his people's anger. He was not coached by his parents and village to lash out against the Romans –and he did not call on his disciples to retaliate against the oppressors.

Instead, Jesus said to his followers, "Follow me."

On following the way of Jesus, Richard Rohr writes, \*

*Human beings have usually dealt with anxiety and evil by sacrificial systems. Something has to be sacrificed. Blood has to be shed. Somebody has to be killed. Someone has to be blamed, accused, attacked, tortured or imprisoned because we just don't know how to deal with evil without sacrificial systems. This always creates religions of exclusion and violence, because we think it is our job to destroy the evil element.*

*As long as we can deal with evil by some means other than forgiveness, we will never experience the real meaning of evil and sin. We will keep projecting it over there, fearing it over there, and attacking it over there, instead of 'gazing' on it within ourselves, and 'weeping' over it within all of us.*

*Jesus took away the sin of the world by showing us that sin is different than we have imagined, and letting us know that our historic pattern of ignorant killing, attacking and scapegoating is in fact history's primary illusion, its primary lie. We need to face the embarrassing truth that we ourselves are our primary problem. Our greatest temptation is to try to change other people, instead of ourselves.*

*To 'scapegoat' is to blame a problem on someone else – and Jesus of Nazareth was the greatest scapegoat in human history. Note that Christianity is the only religion in the world that worships the scapegoat as God. But in*

*worshiping the scapegoat, we should have learned to stop scapegoating. We must stop believing in the persistent myth of redemptive violence and try to understand the divine plan of redemptive suffering.*

*Jesus allowed himself to be transformed, and thereby showed his followers the Way of Transformation. But only a small minority of Christians ever got the point – maybe because when Jesus asked us to do the same, we backed away from it as a life agenda and made it into a cosmic transaction between Jesus and the Father.*

*When we see the cross is a cosmic transaction between Jesus and the Father, we are asking a lot of Jesus but very little of ourselves. We are practiced in saying ‘thank you’ to God and to Jesus, but our deepest ‘thank you’ – following him – will take much more effort.*

If there is anything we are called to learn from the lessons of Good Friday, it will begin when we stop blaming others for our sufferings, and learn to follow Jesus in his Way of Transformation.

\* *Richard Rohr, Things Hidden, pp. 142f, 192f*