



By Paul S. Williams

Good Friday Too!

When I was a child I understood God as a swashbuckling hero—strong, powerful, and confident. An “in-control” God who looked a lot like the Lone Ranger.

When I read the words Jesus spoke on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” I didn’t get it. That didn’t seem like something the Lone Ranger would say. I had a hard time putting my arms around a suffering Christ, one who might actually have felt forsaken by His Father.

But that was before life knocked me around a good bit. Before I so clearly encountered my own weaknesses. Before I came to understand there will always be missing puzzle pieces on this side of eternity. And slowly, I began to appreciate the God who felt forsaken.

My daughter, Jael, came home from college one semester with a gold cross necklace. Jesus was still on the cross. My wife commented, “Why do you have a necklace with Jesus still on the cross? I like

empty crosses better. They’re a better symbol of the resurrection. Jesus isn’t on the cross anymore.”

But I spoke up in support of Jael and her necklace. “This necklace shows the suffering Jesus,” I said. “The one in agony. The one at the end of His rope. I understand that Jesus. I identify with that Jesus. I like the necklace.” My daughter grinned. My wife looked thoughtful. I just held the cross and ran my hand across the Jesus hanging there.

If Jesus did, in fact, feel abandoned by His father, then He’s a man I can trust. He is someone who knows how I feel during the long, dark nights. He is not the conquering hero, riding in with a sword and a strong word, but the wounded healer, full of compassion and understanding. The one who knows suffering before He knows hope.

I can identify with that Jesus. Yes, Easter is about the resurrection. Make no mistake about it. But let’s not forget it’s about Good Friday too.

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Seen & Heard

Compiled by S. J. Dahlman

The graduate film program at Regent University has adopted “artistic guidelines” for its students. The guidelines deal with “the attitude of the Christian toward the arts,” says Robert Schihl, new dean of the communications school, located in Virginia Beach, Virginia. “We’re not here to censor.” Students who are working on films funded by the university, founded by Pat Robertson, will be held to a more stringent standard than those whose projects have outside funding.

—Associated Press

“Hitler’s only original idea was this fusion of art and politics. . . . He understood that, in the modern world, **who-**

ever controls images and symbols has the power. He understood that art reaches people’s subconscious, and that battles will be fought on the spiritual plane of art for people’s souls.”

—Actor John Cusack, interviewed by Beliefnet.com

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received **2,572 complaints about religious discrimination** on the job in 2002, an increase of 85 percent in a decade and more than a 20 percent spurt in a year. Muslims accounted for a little less than half the increase of complaints. Religious complaints comprise only a small portion of all worker reports to the EEOC, but they are rising quickly. Researchers point to

various reasons, including increased religious tensions since 9/11 and a trend toward people identifying religion as more central to their identities.

—Associated Press

“Self-hatred is the biggest problem in the church and culture today. In my 39 years as a pastor, I have found that it is the root of many other problems. All of the Christian psychiatrists and spiritual directors that I meet on my retreats tell me that self-hatred—specifically the inability to accept oneself and one’s shortcomings—is the number one problem in the clients they counsel.”

—Brennan Manning, author of *A Glimpse of Jesus*, quoted in *Publisher’s Weekly*, December 23, 2002