

Good Friday 2023

What happened on Good Friday?

What does Jesus' death and resurrection mean to our lives?

I think this is one of the biggest questions, mysteries and keys of Christian Faith.

Before I'll share some thoughts to this,

I'd like to start with a personal note.

I am very glad to speak today to you –

but on the same hand it is a double challenge for me.

First – as a theologian I am challenged

to put the inexplicable into words.

And as a pastor from Germany I am challenged to do it in a language

which is not my mother's tongue.

But the more I think about it,

searching for words to describe my faith

and searching for words to do it in English -

the more I feel like these both challenges have a lot in common.

Let me explain.

When I decided to move to the UK, which was about one year ago,

I knew: the world surrounding me would switch into English soon.

So I digged out my school English, I read books in English

and did some online lessons on youtube to prepare.

But when I came here, I realized very quickly:

People don't talk the way they do in my books.

They don't always follow the rules of conversation

And concerning my own English, I got very often the feedback:

The grammar is correct – but nobody would express it that way.

That's not everyday English, that's from the books.

That is why, since I am here, I'm on the mission to find vocabulary, expressions and proverbs people actually say

– in order to integrate them into my use of language.

And here we're coming back to the start

– I think, exactly that is a challenge of theological language,

of all my attempts to speak about Good Friday and Easter and my belief, as well.

When I finished my theological studies at University,

I had learned so many

technical terms and definitions,

I had learned latin, greek and hebrew,

In my exam I finally showed that I was able to explain

all the historical facts and theories of origin of the biblical books
as it's written in one thousand academic books about the biblical books -
but that's the point.

Who would really understand that and what does it mean for us?

I think the challenge for me as a pastor is to talk in a way
that connects to our life.

Maybe in expressions and pictures of our daily life.

Because I believe, what happened on Good Friday
deeply has to do with our lives.

God is not far away in the books and definitions

but in Jesus he became human to be close to us and part of our life.

So how can we describe what happened on Good Friday?

What does Jesus' death and resurrection mean to our lives?

This is the try to do it in a new expression.

I think Good Friday is about - *Falling*.

And not only Good Friday,

our life and faith has a lot to do with this verb – *to fall*.

Maybe it's even a picture to describe belief itself.

In the following, I would like to trace this word in its various facets of meaning and, at the end, see what this
has to do with Good Friday and faith.

So - What is falling and what happens, when we fall?

First of all, let us have a small look at the direct meaning.

You can stumble and fall. You can jump and fall.

You can be pushed and fall.

All these situations have in common:

You loose or give up the ground your're standing on.

Secondly, you can use the verb in a more figurative sense.

We can fall for someone we like a lot.

We can fall in love.

What does love have to do with falling?

Maybe more than we see on first sight,

especially when we understand love as wide and complex as the bible does.

When we start loving someone,

we are first fascinated by the other person.

We're fascinated by someone's perspective on life,

what he or she does and says and thinks,

and we are willing to question what we thought we knew

for the promise of the new and exciting.

And there, slowly, starts the falling –
Getting involved with someone might feel like loosing or giving up the familiar ground we were used to stand on.

We're willing to step into the unknown
for the benefit and excitement of being with the other person,
discovering, growing, learning, trying.

And I think this concerns all kinds of love.

Lovers. Families. Friends.

And maybe that's how the disciples felt
when they first heard about Jesus, when they first met him
and listened. They were fascinated – and decided to follow him
and leave behind the familiar, solid ground their lives were built on.

So we see: Falling means to risk something.

We don't always see where we will end up and land.

That can be exciting – or frightening.

It means letting go the control a bit,
being open and vulnerable – and it means to trust.

The disciples followed Jesus and his words,
his promises, without knowing the exact way.

But this falling, falling for someone, can go wrong.

Here we're coming to the next shade -

Jesus is warning us not to fall for the false prophets.

We can fall for lies and wrong promises and traps.

We can follow the wrong ideas,

we can put the wrong values/ interests first

and give up the ground that carried us for a mirage.

We can fall in love with someone who does not love us back
but hurts and uses us.

And then falling turns into something cruel,

we struggle but can't stop the falling

and suddenly we realize the danger that always comes with falling:

Hitting the ground hardly.

This brings us to the saddest side of falling:

Things can just *fall apart*. Against our will.

What we built up in years can turn into dust within a minute,
within a second and we find everything we loved and had trust in,

fallen in pieces.

This is more than a picture, I think this falling is real
and the pain in it is real.

The psalm (Ps 22) gave us an impressive picture
of how it feels when your life falls apart.

Maybe that's what the disciples felt on Good Friday.

They followed Jesus, gave up so much, trusted him
and his promise of a better world to come.

And now they find *him* fallen – in the most brutal way.

Dead. Crucified,
And with him, it looks like all his visions and promises are buried.
There is no visible way out of this.
This is how our lives look like sometimes.
We lose persons we love. And we can't change it.
We have to give up things. We do not see a way out. Jesus is dead.
And that's a pain, that's a grief we have to stand.
Things fail and fall and we can only watch it, unable to stop it.

But we do not have to watch in silence.
The last example I want to give of how we can use the verb falling is:
Falling for and before God.
Jesus himself falls on his knees, the night before Good Friday,
in the garden Gethsemane. He falls on his knees, praying.

He says: Not my will be done, but thy.
What does praying mean if not saying:
Now I see, god,
I do not have everything in my hands, but you do.

And here falling can turn into believing.

Let's remember:
Falling is about losing or giving up control, about trust.
And exactly this letting oneself go and accepting to fall is – believing.
We do it when we pray.
We do it when we trust against all appearances.
We do it when we decide to follow and confess our faith.
We do it when we dare to speak about hope in complete darkness.

Believing means to trust and pray
that things do not fall apart – but *into place*.

Not because I see the way out god - I am just a falling piece.
But because you see exactly where I belong.
God can turn our world upside down, he can change the unchangeable
and make happen the inexplicable.

That does not mean that falling does not exist.
The fear. The grief of letting go.
But Good Friday tells us: God is with us in the pain.
And even in death.
Dying is the hardest form of falling.
And easter is Gods answer.
He can and will rise all the fallen. As he did with Jesus.

I started with two questions –
What happened on Good Friday
and what does Jesus' death and resurrection mean to our lives?

At least, I think since then we can pray:

God, in your mercy,
Let things not fall apart.
Let them fall into place.
Amen.

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