

This week's Lenten Lesson is from The Reverend Hilary Streever

Every year, when preparing for Holy Week, I cringe at the Passion Gospel. There's always a part of me that hopes the story will turn out differently: that Jesus won't be betrayed, flogged, mocked, and executed.

Though Jesus' death is always in the back of my mind, Holy Week makes me gaze at it in all its twisted horror. I sorrow and squirm and grieve at the reality that our Lord accepted *this* end as his. I refuse to watch movies or scenes that portray this death, unable to bear those bloody images haunting me. My imagination is good enough on its own, anyway.

Then "Get behind me, Satan!" snaps me out of my navel gazing and asks me: is my sorrow for Jesus or is it for myself? To be honest, I think it's for both. I cannot bear to imagine the suffering Jesus endured yet my desire to avert my eyes is interwoven with my responsibility for his death. It is a responsibility no mortal can bear, which is why he bore it, but still it haunts me.

Then I remember: I cannot choose or control what happened, nor can I re-write history, and that's a good thing. I cannot imagine that Jesus would have walked to the cross, much less stayed on it, if his death there were not necessary. How can I possibly think that I know better than God what is good and righteous and just and necessary? The arc of salvation history is in much more clever, brave, faithful and loving hands than mine.

If things had gone differently that Friday, if there had been a Hollywood ending and Jesus had been released...the world would not have been changed.

Thankfully, the Son of Man outwit us all, sin and Death included.

Turning the cross, even before the resurrection, upside down, into *the* sign of his unkillable, fierce, eternal love.