

Good Friday, 4.10.2020
Isaiah 53-3-12, John 19:17-42

St. Mark's, Pastor Timothy McKenzie

“It is finished”

Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Good Evening. Thank you for joining us online for Good Friday worship this evening. During this fearful and anxious time we gather this evening to hear again that in the cross of Jesus Christ, God suffers with us, giving us peace. We are not alone in our fears and anxieties. The prophet Isaiah reminds us tonight that the Suffering Servant brings us peace through his suffering, pain, and death.

On Good Friday we meditate upon our own human sinfulness and upon the love and mercy of God. We remember why God became human: *“For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* We remember that God loves us and our world. We live in a time, when for many people, a loving God might seem hard to believe. However, tonight we remember again how God is truly with us. God seems powerless and weak in the world, but this is precisely how God helps us. God suffers in our humanity and with us. This is the meaning of Christ's cross. God suffered and died on the cross for us so that death no longer has power over us. In the cross we see that God has some “skin in the game.” This is how much God loves humanity: that God will die for our sinful humanity.

Yet even in the Good Friday drama, our humanity needs help right up to the bitter end. The crowd that welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday turned against him on Good Friday. Their shouts of “Hosanna!” became cries of “Crucify him!” At the center of the Gospel narrative there is a miscarriage of justice. Pilate, refused to take responsibility as judge, and washed his hands of the affair. Jesus' disciple Peter, the first to confess Jesus as Messiah, denied knowing Jesus three times. Jesus' other disciples were noticeably absent at the cross, except for the disciple that Jesus loved. However, the women, Mary the Mother of our Lord, his mother's sister, and Mary Magdalene were there, and it was also the women who were first at the tomb, and who were the first to believe in and announce Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus was handed over to be executed. He was beaten, mocked, spit upon and then crucified outside the gate of the city, as a common criminal. Pilate avoided any leadership and responsibility that might have saved Jesus, allowing the crowd to decide Jesus' fate. Pilate said he could find no guilt in Jesus, but he allowed the crowd to choose a known criminal named Barabbas, instead. This

is a story of humanity making bad decisions. Yet this is why Jesus was born to Mary. In Christ, God became human to suffer and die. God became human to save us from ourselves, and to show our human wisdom as folly and even outright sinful behavior.

On Good Friday it seems that darkness and death are victorious over light and life. In our world today, we have become very conscious of our own mortality and human frailty. We have seen how hard it is for human societies in many different nations to combat not only illness and death, but we have also seen human inability to manage a pandemic together. On Good Friday this year, we sit isolated from one another as we have never experienced in our lifetimes. Though we may not talk openly about it, our fear of death is always close by. Though it is springtime and the world is blossoming and lush with new growth, we find it hard to celebrate.

It is precisely here that we need to hear the message of Good Friday again. God is with us in the darkness. God has visited death before us to make a path for us to new life. God will be with us when we face our own deaths. Only the suffering God is able to help us. Martin Luther wrote of the God hidden in suffering. This is why the crucifix is such a powerful symbol, because it is there that we see God hidden in our human suffering and death. In Christ on the cross we see that we are not alone; God is with us in our human suffering.

The prophet Isaiah wrote of a Suffering Servant, *“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”* The disciples and early Christians identified Jesus’ suffering with these words from Isaiah. The one who suffers with us gives us peace and healing.

In Philippians, Paul wrote of Christ’s *“kenosis”*, or “self-emptying” work, writing that Christ *“emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness...he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”* In Christ, God gave up all privilege and power to become an outcast and powerless, sharing our humanity, so that we could see what redemptive suffering and love really look like. In John’s gospel Jesus’ last words from the cross are, *“It is finished.”* *“It is finished”* are not words of despair and hopelessness; rather, words that mean “it is accomplished.” *“It is finished”* it means my work is finished, and my task is accomplished. Christ’s human work is most clearly seen on the cross as one who suffered innocently for others.

How many of us will reach the end of our lives and be able to say, “It is finished?” How many of us will be able to empty ourselves for others to the degree that we will be able to say, “I have accomplished all that God sent me into this world to do?” In the ultimate moment of irresponsibility,

Pilate washed his hands, while Jesus opened his hands allowing them to receive nails on behalf of all humanity. The cross reminds us of what our humanity is truly capable of if we are liberated from human folly, fear and sin. The cross reminds us, like nowhere else, that it is possible to give one's entire life for others.

On Good Friday, we ask ourselves, "Lord, what is your will for my life?" "Lord, how might I be able to empty myself and live for others?" Good Friday is about seeing clearly - very clearly - the power of love that suffers for others. Such love is redemptive, because how we suffer with our neighbor today affects how our neighbor will be able to live for tomorrow. There is an ethics to the cross that should help us strive to live for others each day.

On Good Friday we strip our sanctuary bare to remind ourselves that Christ allowed himself to be stripped of everything for each of us. Christ emptied himself, so that we might be filled with hope in the darkness. Little by little, may we also strip ourselves, because it is in emptying ourselves that we become filled with the power of God, allowing us to live for others. Amen.