

4.7.2023 Good Friday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Isaiah 53:3-12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25; John 18:1-19:42

“He bore the sin of many”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

On Good Friday, we join with Christians in every place to meditate upon Jesus, his cross, and its meaning for us today. The prophet Isaiah’s words are helpful on Good Friday: *“He poured out himself in death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”*

From the beginning, Christians have understood Jesus’ cross and death as for *“the sin of many.”* In John’s gospel, Jesus famously declares, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* In addition, just before his Passion, Jesus also said, *“In the world you will face persecution. But take courage; I have overcome the world!”* (Jn. 16:33). The prophets, and Jesus’ own words about himself, reveal the suffering servant of God, the one who overcomes the sin of the world.

As we meditate on the cross and its meaning for us today, we begin by remembering that Jesus bore the sin of many. Jesus’ Passion narrative involves many people – it is our world in microcosm. The chief priests and scribes, the Roman soldiers and temple police, Pilate and the crowd, Peter and the disciples, the criminals crucified with him, the three Marys standing at the cross, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus – Jesus bore their sin, and he bears our sin in this world. On Good Friday, where do you find yourself in the Passion story? Where would you have been on Good Friday?

The religious elite were jealous of Jesus, and used their power to arrest and kill an innocent man. The soldiers and temple police beat and abused a helpless prisoner. His disciple, Peter, denied him, saying he was not a disciple. For his part, Pilate wanted to acquit Jesus, finding no case against him. Repeatedly, Pilate tried to release Jesus, but was overcome by the crowd who turned on him saying, *“You are no friend of the emperor.”* With remarkable hypocrisy, the religious elite, who had accused Jesus of saying he was the king of the Jews, said to Pilate, *“We have no king but the emperor.”* Jesus bore the sin of all of these.

The Roman judicial system could not free an innocent man. The crowds were no doubt made up of good upstanding citizens, who also became a murderous mob. Religious leaders, military, police, judges, and everyday people committed a miscarriage of justice. On Good Friday, where

do you find yourself in the Passion story? Where would you have been on Good Friday?

This story continues to speak to us because our world has not really changed very much. Of course, we are more advanced scientifically and materially, but human beings have not been able to overcome the ongoing sin of the world. This is why Jesus' cross is still relevant today. This is why the suffering of God still contains life-giving and infinite possibility for today.

We live in a world that has learned to live without God. We see it all around us. We have faith, but it is faith in the advance of science and technology. *We believe* in human progress. Given enough time and money, *we believe* that all problems can be overcome.

Humanity has learned to deal with everything except humanity. Human beings have learned to solve many of the ills and suffering of the human body, but we have not been able to solve the human condition and the suffering we cause. We manage everything in daily life without God, and yet we cannot manage to overcome our jealousy, greed, cruelty, injustice, and violence.

We have overcome many things, but we have not overcome ourselves. This is what the Passion story is really about. It points to our ongoing and deeply embedded sin. It points to the world's ongoing resistance to imitate Jesus by carrying his cross in suffering with and for others. Ironically, Jesus' cross is well-known in the world, because throughout history nations have continued to carry his cross into war, yet have continued to resist carrying it in suffering for their neighbor in need.

Please look at the cross on the high altar. It is veiled and Christ crucified is hidden from view, yet the eyes of faith know that Jesus is there, suffering for the world. Jesus and his cross continue to be misunderstood today. Some look at the cross and see only an ancient story, wishful thinking that has been overcome by human progress. Some look at the cross and wonder what it means; trying to look through the cross anxious see to Christ raised and victorious in glory. And so, they never encounter the suffering Christ. They are like the reading from Isaiah tonight, "*As one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.*" Even the church has hidden its face from the cross, choosing instead to look for God's glory rather than at Christ's suffering in the world.

That's the trouble; the cross is not transparent. It is not something we can avoid or look through. The cross is more like a mirror. In the cross we see our own reflection; in the cross we see the sin of our world, its institutions and systems. In the cross we see Jesus bearing all of our humanity, sin and suffering, overcoming the world with God's love. This is why we call today "good" – Good

Friday. The goodness of God's love is revealed in the cross and in the Passion story. God does not overcome the world with violence or force, but by the self-sacrifice of love. The cross announces the death of death.

He poured himself out in death; he bore the sin of many so that we might know how to suffer with others. Daily, we live surrounded by the terror of death. It is deep within our bone and marrow, so should we be surprised that death is encountered in everything human beings create? We have progressed, but like the Passion story, we still struggle with our own human systems of power. In the face of our modern progress, we struggle with our own lack of progress in loving our neighbor in need. We still struggle with overcoming our human sinfulness.

Jesus and his cross will always mean that the suffering, the poor, the weak, the dying, are not invisible or transparent. The cross forever makes plainly clear God's choice of being with and in our human suffering.

The cross prepares us for the hope of life and resurrection. The cross bids us to be living signs of hope and resurrection, calling us to share in his sufferings in this world.

Finally, on Good Friday we must realize that the cross keeps Jesus from disappearing out of sight in the world. The cross leaves open the question of God's love for this world. Its shape means that the church must always be cruciform in its work in this world. A servant church is the church of Jesus Christ where it exists for others, suffering with this world that God so loves.

This is the "good" in Good Friday, because only the suffering God overcomes death, forgives, and raises us to new life.

What is "good" for you about Good Friday?

On Good Friday how is Jesus calling you to help others?

Where do you suffer with Jesus for the love of this world?

Amen.