

3.29.2024 Good Friday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

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

“He testifies to the truth”

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

The Passion according to St. John contains the well-known conversation between Jesus and Pilate in which Jesus says, “*You say that I am a king, For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.*” Pilate asked him, “*What is truth?*” Jesus testifies to the truth. He reveals the truth about himself, about the world, and about each of us.

In John’s gospel, Jesus calls himself “*the way, and the truth and the life.*” The truth of Jesus is a powerful reality offering a way of living in this world. His truth, however, is not of this world and does not need the support or force of the world, government, or leaders to testify to it.

In saying, “*My kingdom is not from this world,*” Jesus is saying something powerful about kingdoms of this world. Empires and governments, kings and leaders have tried to use Jesus’ word to uphold their power, but the truth of God’s living Word and his kingdom of peace cannot be put into the service of another’s wishes, purposes, or plans. The Word of truth Jesus Christ alone is eternal, laying bare our inability even in daily matters to be truthful about ourselves. His truth cannot be exploited by the world, governments, or the systems we have created. His truth reveals our misuse of truth.

No one in the Passion narrative is innocent except for Jesus. On Good Friday, everyone around Jesus is incapable of testifying to the truth except for him. As Isaiah writes, “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*” The chief priests and temple police, Judas and the crowds, Peter and the disciples, Pilate and the soldiers are all complicit in misunderstanding the truth of Jesus. Again, as Isaiah writes, “*By a perversion of justice he was taken away...yet he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.*” Though an innocent man was killed, he willingly took our sin upon himself so he might testify to the truth of God’s love.

I ask you to look at the veiled cross at the high altar. This is the truth that Jesus testifies to: in the cross the love of God is veiled and hidden from the world. On Good Friday we do not veil the cross simply because Jesus’ death is sad or because we are in mourning. The cross is veiled because God is always hidden in Christ on the cross. God is hidden in Jesus and only those who belong to him

see him and hear his voice. Jesus is the *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God. He was hidden from chief priests and temple police; he was hidden from Judas and the crowds; he was hidden from Peter and the disciples; he was hidden from Pilate and the soldiers. We venerate the cross on Good Friday because it is the only place where we see with clarity the truth of God's love hidden and revealed in Jesus Christ.

Yet Jesus' cross and his truth continue to be misunderstood. The world and its leaders continue to attempt to usurp the power of his truth, but it remains his truth alone to reveal. It is telling that churches are full on Easter but less so on Good Friday. Humanity feels more comfortable with a God whom we can glorify and worship than with the God who reveals our sinful weakness and human hypocrisy. It is easier to control a God who sits safely in heaven than a God who calls us to follow and suffer alongside of those whom the world would rather not see or would rather forget – the outcast, the oppressed, the poor, and the stranger. Jesus continues to have many who desire his feasts of glory, but few who will carry his cross of suffering in this world.

On Good Friday, Jesus continues to reveal the truth about this world and its sinful systems of power, about governments and leaders, and even about our misuse of religion. In the Passion story, the chief priests and temple police brought the full judgement of religious law upon Jesus rather than showing him compassion. Passing judgement upon him, they handed Jesus over to Pilate in order to keep their hands and conscience clean. Shouting, "*We have no king but the emperor!*" religious leaders revealed the truth that religion continues to judge the weak, the stranger and the oppressed, while supporting systems of wealth and power in this world.

Peter and the disciples proved to be fair weather friends. Except for the disciple whom Jesus loved none of them were to be found at the cross, the truth about Jesus was hidden even from those who called themselves his disciples.

As for Pilate, though he was governor of Judea and presided over the trial of Jesus, Pilate was unable to bring about justice. Even Pilate, knowing that his power had been given from above, was unable to follow his conscience and release Jesus.

The crowd was also unable to speak the truth about Jesus. Days earlier, Jesus had been met with palm branches and cries of "*Hosanna!*" yet on this day, the crowd shouted, "*Away with him! Crucify him!*" People continue to reject and kill the prophets that God sends to them, preferring those who promise them everything except the truth about themselves and God's reign of justice and love.

And so, a man with no sin died under the crushing weight of humanity's sin to save and forgive this world God so loves.

Jesus' final words from the cross were "*It is finished.*" For this he was born, to finish God work of love for humanity by carrying the cross for you and for me.

For this he was born, so we might see the truth about ourselves – so we might see our complicity and our responsibility in the sinful brokenness of this world. Good Friday is "good" precisely because we see the truth of God's love hidden in Jesus and his cross.

Look to his cross and listen for his voice. Jesus hides his cross in you so that you might do his work in this world.

While there is yet time, carry his cross and love your neighbor. At the end of your life, his cross hidden in you will help you to also say, "*It is finished,*" as you complete the work God has entrusted to you. Amen.