

## Sermon Good Friday 2022

As you look behind me you see a bare altar. Gone is all the beauty and the color; gone. The things that made it look good have been stripped away and it is now unadorned raw wood. It could be your life with all that the pretense stripped away, the things you want to hide you know are there but usually hidden in some way. You would not want those things like guilt and regrets, those things you carry unseen, things you wished had never happened, things you are sorry about as you bring to mind that, yes, you really did them. They may be simple things that now just surface, or big things that never really go away. You do not want them to be made known. I can feel that Jesus' disciples felt full of guilt and regrets when they thought how they had abandoned Jesus at his arrest. But they did it, as you have heard. It must have been for them, a terrible burden to carry.

Tonight you just heard the Passion Gospel from St. John. The details hurt so much to hear. Throughout the reading it showed how intentional Jesus was that this was the way it was going to be. He, and only he, was the one they were to arrest, put on trial to convict (however false the accusations were) torture and kill by crucifixion. You note that this was the cruelest way authorities had invented for publicly killing criminals. The religious authorities were determined to get rid of him. Pilate the Roman Governor realized he had done nothing other than to upset these powerful religious men who wanted to be rid of this man who spoke of God and for God in ways that were different from theirs. How could this man claim to be with God, in God? It was blasphemy. These religious leaders were afraid of him, they would not and could not understand him and comprehend his relationship with God. Pilate seemed to know he had done nothing to deserve death. Being at odds with the religious leaders was not a crime which deserved the death penalty, but Jews had a special relationship with their God and blasphemy seemed a terrible crime to them. Pilate caved; anything to keep the peace. Those religious leaders had their own way; this man was to die and be gone, so they thought.

Have you ever been unjustly accused of something? Have you been made to pay a penalty you did not deserve to pay? It may have been your fate over the years, even many times. Certainly, these past two years and more of covid restrictions have made us all suffer in ways we have felt completely undeserved. No, of course we have not been tortured and thankfully you, and all participating from home as well as those of us here are still alive and if you had the covid virus at any time you have recovered or are recovering. But the mental anguish of the time of enforced separation may still be weighing on your heart and mind. I have found I did not remember how we worshipped at this time last year and in 2020. I know many of you suffered extreme isolation, especially the first 12 months or so. That suffering can help you empathize with the disciples who were feeling devastated early that first Good Friday. If Peter shared with them right away his story of denying he knew Jesus the previous night, they would have been horrified at his sharing. They would have gasped that he, their leader had been so afraid of admitting he even knew Jesus that he had denied he was a disciple. But by the end of that day, that Good Friday, they were all going to be grief stricken, filled with a yawning desolation and a realization that Jesus, their beloved leader was dead. Yes, Jesus was dead.

Others had a different experience that first Good Friday. The women who had followed Jesus and "ministered to him and his disciples" as the Gospel stated had a different experience that day from Jesus group of disciples. The women were not afraid of the religious authorities nor of the Roman soldiers. They were not in any danger of being arrested and tortured, they knew that. They certainly would not want to be alone near a crowd of Roman soldiers but in this very public place they had no fears for their own safety. They would have melted into the crowd surging out to Golgotha, the place of

crucifixion. There, beside the cross they waited beneath the cross, through Jesus last agonizing hours. His mother Mary, Mary Magdalene and other women were there, weeping torrents. How could he be made to suffer in this way? How could “they” do this to such a wonderful and good man? It did not make sense. And after Jesus had in fact died and been brought down from the cross, Mary Magdalene and another Mary followed Joseph of Arimathea to the burial place Joseph was providing for him. I can see their agony, as they watched as his poor tortured body was speedily wrapped and laid to rest, all done hurriedly because the Sabbath was about to begin, and they were forbidden to be out walking or working once it had begun. But unlike Jesus disciples, the women were there, all that day, watching in horror. What agony, what desolation, what grief, what unbelievable pain they endured.

Where do you think you would have been? Would you have wanted to be with the women, or would that have been too hard, or would you have wanted to be far away, still in desolation, or safe hiding with the men? Maybe you have no clue what you would have done. But where were you today, what were you during Jesus’ agonizing hours today? We will soon sing, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord. Were you there when they laid him in a tomb?”

This may bring you a feeling of guilt, just as I invited you to reflect upon earlier. What if now you are remembering not just your guilt but also those things people did to you. Can you feel them? When you bring to mind what happened is it always a case of “I didn’t start it” and thus the blame is with the other person. But that is in the past and the past has gone. If instead you changed the statement to “I could end it?” that is present and future and so action is possible. Of course, some acts of forgiveness seem completely impossible. When you feel so wronged that forgiveness would be like lifting a huge boulder as big as yourself you know it sounds impossible. But if you say to God, “Please help me make the decision to work on forgiveness for whatever was done to me,” God will be with you. The only person who can help move that boulder is God because with God, nothing is impossible.

But Jesus agony on the cross ended in his death. Jesus came to earth to show all people everywhere then and forever how to live. Jesus life was a life of love. That was what he showed people then and shows today. The only way to live is by a life of love. But those leaders then put him to death in the most barbaric way they could, they would not accept, could not accept that it was God in Jesus they had demanded to be put to a human death. But you know God raised Jesus back to life. Jesus the man who walked the earth as you walk the earth, God raised back to life. Jesus now lives; death was not the end. Jesus rose above selfish humanity. We do not know how this happened, but we know why. God allowed humans to crucify God’s son, but they could not end God’s love. God accepted the cross, the agony and shame knowing that this was not the end. For you, hearing these Gospel words again; filling your heart with grief God says do not be overcome, do not be overwhelmed. Yes, they put me to death, but I overcame death.

And God reminds you that for each of you who is suffering in your earthly life God can empathize. God understands suffering and pain. Jesus never promised life will be without pain. Jesus’ earthly life ended in terrible suffering and pain, separated from many loved ones, humiliated, tortured, rejected, and left to die in agony. Jesus understands pain. But Jesus reminds you that his life was spent sharing love. He wants you to know today that sharing love is the best way to live, it is the only way to live. Jesus love overcame hate and overcame rejection. Fill your heart with his love and carry it with you these next hours until the third day, the day we call Easter, the day when you will celebrate his resurrection, his return to life and love. Amen

