

## Good Friday 2013

In John's Gospel Jesus brings life to those who follow him and his signs. Jesus listens to God and then shares what he learns. Over and over John repeats that his authority is that he receives wisdom, truth, and peace from God. It does not originate with him.

John proclaims Jesus as [slowly] the light of the world, the bread of life, the true vine, the Good Shepherd, the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus invites us to ponder what it means to be born again by a Spirit who is the movement and breath of God. Jesus offers living water to all who receive this life of the ages—abundant eternal life.

These are truths which draw us into the mercy of God, truths which fill our spirits with a rich wholeness and freedom to care.

But today, *today*, we face the painful reality of Jesus dying on a plain cross. For all intents and purposes, it could be a hangman's noose or an electric chair. In Jesus' day, people did not wear crosses around their necks. It was a dreaded, hated tool of shame and terror for the masses.

The cross engages the depths. Our faith in the God-man who willingly accepted the death penalty emerges from the cross.

It wasn't long after his death that baptism became a sign not only of being part of the household of this God-man Jesus, but baptism in Christ was a baptism into his very real death. This is not “feel good” religion.

We are not free to go lightheartedly along ignoring/covering up our sorrows and the violence which is quietly and loudly all around us. Our faith must take seriously these painful realities which threaten to bring all of our personal hopes and dreams to a close. How does the life of God square with the cross?!?

I often feel as though some have made it into a bit of magic which saves us with or without our bodies, minds, souls, or spirits. That's not what I see going on in the cross with Jesus. The cross is a complete integration of everything about Jesus. Everything that he experienced, everything that he taught, all that he healed and loved.

As is true with us if we are honest—if we get it—the cross is the opposite of the disciples' expectations. We associate dying with losing the battle of life. Death is the end of our life on earth. We live in others' memories, but we are then no longer direct agents among the living.

Jesus also faced this appearance. In his submission to death, he was handing over his future to God but also to his friends. The ministry became their's. Indeed, that is exactly what happened. Jesus let go of all of his personal dreams and hopes. Jesus allowed his life to fall back into the all consuming, richness of God's abundance. Everything he taught, he practiced in the cross. According to tradition, at 33 years old. That's a very young age to die.

Jesus loved and served. He taught and healed. The people of power insisted he stop. He refused. He chose death over giving up his call from God.

In this, Jesus shows what is the love—the life of God. The cross reveals that faithful living, loving, and dying is more important than personal happiness, personal freedom, or staying alive to die at a ripe old age.

The cross is God's final word on all our attempts to save ourselves. For some, faith can be a human attempt to justify ourselves and convince ourselves and everyone else that we are good enough. ***Faith*** is trusting in God's mercy. Faith is trusting that God's grace is stronger than all of the appearances in the universe. Grace ***feels*** weak, unresolved. Its messy. But therein lies its strength.

The cross is salvation. The cross is compassion. The cross is freedom. The cross sets us free from our need to prove ourselves and to score points with God. Our King, Jesus, on the cross clearly proclaims that God can be trusted beyond all appearances otherwise. We don't have to *make* things work. We only have to trust. When doubts arise, remember the cross! When you feel condemned or the need to condemn another person, remember the cross!

Of course it makes no sense! That is why it is so powerful.

We are baptized into the untimely death of our Lord. Tonight we need to sit with that for a while. We cannot gloss over it to Sunday because we prefer resurrection to death. If we do, we miss the point. We then have a lifeless resurrection which has grown out of a deathless cross.

There is hopelessness, despair, agony, great overwhelming sorrow in death. No one is untouched by death. In the cross we come face to face with this enemy named death. We have been baptized into his death. We spend a good deal of time in the valley of the shadow of death. That is what the cross means. It means that Jesus is in it with us. God is in it with us. In death. Whatever death is, we are not alone in it.

Good Friday and Easter are inseparable. They are equally baffling. They leave us equally lost...and found. They require us to equally trust in a compassionate God who loves us. . .all the same.

Good Friday is not mostly about feeling something about Jesus. It's about identifying with Jesus' death.

We walk with his friends through the time of his death. They didn't know what to make of it. Neither do we know what to make of the many deaths we experience.

If we think we have it all figured out, then we are still lost! One thing we know is that we must trust God in our own deaths. As with Jesus, so with us.

There are no shortcuts in this journey of waiting and walking into God's goodness and life. We wait with Christ--in Christ. Tonight we consider holy mysteries yet to be fully revealed in our own pain and suffering and death. Christ has gone before us in love. We have a path to follow.

God is good, and God will make sense of our pain and sorrow even as God has done so in Christ. We walk by faith, not by sight. Tonight is a night of remembrance, of faith in mercy beyond our own comprehension. Thanks be to God for this hope which we share together.

Amen.