

## **“GOOD NEWS IN THE WORST PLACES”**

**John 19:17-30**

(04-02-21) Good Friday

**The Rev. Victor Kim**

Why do we gather in worship this morning? ***Why have a Good Friday service when we know that Easter is only three days away? Why go through the motions of being sad when we know that the story doesn't end this way, that soon enough the tears of joy will replace our tears of sorrow? Why would we seek to confront the horror of the cross when the glory of the empty tomb is so much more appealing?***

We can't help but to experience Good Friday through the perspective of an Easter people, but I want you to imagine being with the disciples on that Friday, the day of preparation for the Sabbath. Imagine being with Peter and Andrew, James and John as they see Jesus being taken by the soldiers, wearing a crown of thorns, forced to carry his own cross on the way to Golgotha. Imagine watching as the soldiers pound the nails into his wrists and his feet and as they hoist the cross into place. You stand there in the shadow of the cross as the soldiers merrily gamble for his garments. You seethe with rage but your rage is toothless which makes it all the more intense. And Jesus, now spent, with his dying breath speaks his final words,  
***it is finished. And it is over.***

And they stand around that cross like we do at gravesites, unsure when to leave, unable to tear ourselves away from that place, because to do so seems so final. We can only imagine how the disciples must have spent the next two days. Perhaps they replayed the events of the past few weeks and days over and over in their minds, wondering if they could have done anything any differently that might have changed the outcome.

Maybe Peter and the rest were wracked with guilt knowing that in their cowardness they had forsaken and denied their master. Maybe some kept on trying to remember the words Jesus had spoken regarding his death and vainly sought some meaningful understanding of them which might bring them even an ounce of hope. ***Whatever may have transpired in the days between the crucifixion and the resurrection, they must have been the worst days of the disciples' lives. Days lived in lost despair, in utter desolation, when nothing seems to be able to break through the darkness of suffering.***

Again, I know that for us the story doesn't end with the cross, but the disciples, the ones who followed Jesus and saw him die that day, they didn't have the same benefit of the final chapters of the gospel story. We know the ending they couldn't know. ***And so the question needs to be asked, without the perspective of the resurrection, was there anything good about that Friday those many years ago? Did God abandon his creation during the time between his son's death and his resurrection? Do the days between that first Good Friday and that first Easter Sunday fall outside the plan of God? Is God absent in this time, in this the worst of places? The answer can only be, no! never! Even in that time, when the son of God is neither on earth or in heaven, even in those days, in the worst of places, God is not absent, God does not abandon.***

Let us try to free ourselves from the tendency to see the event of the cross with rose-coloured glasses. ***Jesus' death is not just a mere pre-requisite for his resurrection. It is unto itself, a horrible, chilling, painful, terrible suffering and death. Just because the resurrection occurs does not make the death any less painful or real. And it needs to be this way because we know that human existence, our lives, all too often more closely resembles the pain and suffering of the cross than the supernatural joy and peace of the resurrection.***

We want to know joy and peace, success and happiness, but too often all we know is sorrow and strife, failure and sadness. Its not only the death of someone close to us which brings us into the worst of places, there is so much which can take us into the depths of pain and suffering. A ruptured relationship, a meaningless job, an unexpected diagnosis. ***There are places we know in our lives where things are so bad that we are sure that even God must be absent.*** If you've been paying attention to the news this week, you know all too well that our world is full of events that make us wonder whether God could be present in the midst of such horror and tragedy.

But the fact remains that the days between the crucifixion and the resurrection also fall within God's care and providence. Though we know that God desires us to have life and to have it abundantly, and though we know that ultimately at the end of a faithful life there is the promise of eternal joy, ***still in the midst of those days when we cannot see any light, when there seems to be no way out, when despair, desolation, destruction and death seem our only companions, even in those days God is present and God's care and providence surrounds us.***

We worship together this morning, not only in anticipation of the Easter to come, ***but also in the knowledge and assurance, that even in the worst of places, on that terrible hill outside Jerusalem, on the day the son of God died, on the days when we think it would be better off for us if we also were dead, even in the worst of places, God's love and care, his grace and mercy still rules. This is the good news of Good Friday, that God has been, and will be, in the most awful places in which we find ourselves, even in the places where we are sure God is absent.***<sup>1</sup>

Good Friday is the promise of good news in the worst places. In the funeral homes, by the graveside, in the emergency rooms, in the divorce courts, in the unemployment line, in the shelters, in the refugee camps, in the war zones, ***wherever the worst places in our lives happen to be, God is there, God has been there.***

Good Friday is God's good news that there is no place, there is nothing in our lives which God cannot comprehend, which God has not known because God has been on that cross. God knows senselessness and horror, God knows violence and abuse, God knows every heartbreak and every tear filled night and because he knows, it is good news in the worst places. ***That's why we're here, to acknowledge that even though the resurrection will come, even though God has promised us the victory, in the meantime, in between days, when we lose sight of that promise and we lose hope, when we come face to face with the worst of places, even the reality of our own death, our God has been there too and because he has, because he has and because he has overcome, we can know his good news in our worst places.***

Thanks be to God, Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Helmer, ***Worship that Works***