

Good Friday Sermon, April 7, 2023

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For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. That whosoever believeth in Him shall not die but have life everlasting.

While this is not our Gospel reading today, it is at the heart of the Passion of Christ. Jesus was born and lived and died because God SO loved the world. And now it is finished. The Paschal Lamb has been sacrificed for us. And it is up to us to live into our inheritance of everlasting life.

While Jesus' final words are "It is finished, our work begins today. And today is Good Friday. Holy Friday the day we reverently recount the horrific details of Jesus' last day on earth.

For God so loved the world...

Remember, on the day Jesus was crucified, no one knew the "rest of the story." No one knew what would happen in three days' time.

His followers and family, friends and foes, the faithful and the feckless all thought this was the end. Jesus' fate, they thought, was sealed and he would die on a cross never to be heard from again after his last words, "It is finished." The same words that the High Priest would use after slaughtering the sacrificial lamb. The same words used when a debt was paid in full - in Greek it was written Tetelestai - it is finished.

Now stop and listen. A deafening hush falls over the crowd as Jesus bows his head and gives up his spirit. Brace yourself or flinch at Mary's gut-wrenching cry as she feels the soldier's sword stabs through her heart as surely as it pierced Jesus' side. Stand back and watch as the crowd begins to quietly disperse - the spectacle is over and "it is finished."

That He gave His only begotten Son...

Jesus is the ultimate Paschal Lamb, sacrificed for us. In his death our sins are forgiven and our relationship with God is restored and renewed.

And now those who have believed in him in life, care for him in death. Joseph, a disciple afraid to be known as one of Jesus' followers, comes out of the shadows to take Jesus' body off the cross. I can see Mary rushing to her son's body, cradling his head and kissing him goodbye one last time. And the beloved disciple gently guiding her away as Nicodemus, comes into the light bringing the herbs and spices needed to anoint Jesus' body for burial. The Son of God is loved in death as in life.

And the story ends where it begins, in a garden, where Jesus is laid to rest in an empty tomb.

That whosoever believeth in Him shall not die...

The events of Jesus' last day on earth seem unreal. Jesus the teacher and healer is arrested while praying in a garden. He is betrayed by one friend and taken to the authorities who find no charges against him, yet the crowd of high priests and religious leaders cry for his crucifixion. He is denied by another friend who could have spoken up for him. Jesus' disciples, his friends for who he is prepared to die, have betrayed him, denied him and deserted him. These same friends, who just the day before had heard Jesus' new commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you,"

So, as we live into our inheritance -this new contract, this new covenant with God, it is important that we remember Jesus' last day and how he died. But it is **IMPERATIVE** that we remember how he lived and how he loved.

Even while hanging on the cross Jesus embodied love when he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" Love one another was Jesus' final message to those he loved.

But have life everlasting.

It is finished, but our work begins today. We are now the disciples of Christ, living in a world where many would still betray, deny and desert him. We are the inheritors of a new relationship with God. No longer do we need to be separated from God by sin for our sins have been forgiven through his Son's death. It is ours to believe in the power of prayer through Christ, ours to believe in the promise of life everlasting through Baptism by the Holy Spirit, and ours to have the strength and courage to love and serve God with gladness and singleness of heart through Christ our Lord.

It is finished, but our work will not be done until we breathe our last. And until that day, let us go forth in the name of Christ bringing peace and love throughout the world, loving one another as Jesus showed us on the cross.

Amen.