

Good Friday Sermon Notes – 10th April 2020

From Rev'd Jilleen Chambers

How are we all travelling in this strange land where we are exiled from our normal Easter practices? No church services or gatherings, no family visits, no hugs or handshakes when we meet old friends. Instead we have to keep our distance and search for toilet paper, soap and hand sanitiser, tissues; and flour, sugar, rice, pasta and pasta sauce – the list could go on.

Hard to believe, but only a couple of months ago we had never heard of COVID-19. Now it is forever etched into our lives. It is part of our conversation, it governs what we can do, whom we see, and where we can go. Yes, there was some new virus in China that looked worrying but that was far away. We were too busy dealing with a hot summer, drought and unprecedented bush fires that devastated so many communities.

Like many of you, I have been following the latest news. It is full of statistics, the number of people infected with COVID-19, the rate of infection – up or down, and all too sadly the numbers of people who have lost their battle with the virus. Reminders: to stay home, wash your hands, sneeze into your elbow. And then there are the numbers of people out of work and businesses closed, and a government trying desperately to stay ahead of the curve and support the suddenly unemployed. It is a different world and a new language.

In some ways, Good Friday is like that. It has brought a different dimension and language to our world and to our understanding of God. It has turned the world upside down; or we could say, the world is now the right way up.

I have heard the story of Good Friday for most of my life. The first time would have been when I was eight years old. I was intrigued by the story but I struggled to make sense of it then and I have continued to ponder on it ever since. If we are really honest Good Friday is still something that always eludes us. We prefer to hurry on ahead to resurrection on Easter Sunday.

But what if? What if we pause and take another look at Good Friday.

On Good Friday, we would normally gather for a more solemn and restrained service. A service that reminds us of a crucifixion that took place on a rocky hill outside Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago. To hear again the story that birthed our faith – of the Son of God who died in our place. The readings for Good Friday give us some insight into this most significant truth of our Christian faith.

Isaiah 52: verse 13 to ch 53: verse 12

The servant whose form was marred; who was despised, rejected and suffering. The silent servant who took our infirmities and sorrows; who was wounded for our transgressions, and took our punishment; his life was an offering for our sin. Isaiah declared that he shall make many righteous and make intercession for us. It is God who will vindicate him, make him great and lift him up.

Psalm 22.

In the first verse we hear the cry of dereliction: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me: there is agony, the mockers and the casualness of the executioners who cast lots for the victims clothing. The psalm concludes with expressions of faith in a God who does not turn his face away from the suffering one but hears him, it declares that the kingdom is the Lord's and he shall rule over the nations. For God is righteous. God will save the life of the wretched one for himself and God's righteousness will be declared by future generations.

1st Corinthians 1: 18-31.

Paul writes that the message of the cross declares the power and wisdom of God. The proclamation of Christ crucified is a stumbling block and foolishness to many, but God's foolishness is wiser than all human wisdom; his weakness stronger than human strength. Let our boast be in Christ for God is the source of our life.

The Gospel reading from **John 18: 1 to ch 19: 42** tells the story of the Thursday evening betrayal and Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane; his trial by the High Priest; Peter's denial; Pilate's confusion and questions when Jesus' refused to defend himself; the flogging and mocking; the crowds demanding his death; his crucifixion and death; his quick entombment in a borrowed grave.

Today we were to sing the old African American spiritual: Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble; were you there when they crucified my Lord?

We know what happened and who did what. It could remain just a story that happened two millennia ago, a story of a different place and time, of a harsh society and fickle and frail people; of an extraordinary man who was a hero in the face of adversity. Or is it something more? What are the implications of this story for here and now in the midst of a pandemic that has turned our world inside out and destroyed countless lives?

Each time I hear this story and ponder it anew, I see something different. The love that held Jesus to the cross until everything was completed; his obedience that nullified our disobedience; his death that paid the price for us, redeemed us, and set us free from the fear of death; through his life and death we have the promise of eternal life; and his trust in his Father to strengthen him and bring him through in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In this time and place, the thought that comes to mind for me is that Jesus suffered and died! He knows what it is to die. That Jesus died is eternally wondrous. The Son of God, God incarnate, died on that cross. He didn't just appear to die, he died! Have another look at the reading from John – when the soldiers pierced his side, blood and water flowed out.

Jesus knows and understands what it is to be human: our fears and the pain of physical suffering; the pain of loss and death. Jesus' death assures us that God is not a stranger to our pain, our confusion, and sorrow, or our fears of death. God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not remote but in the midst of the pain and angst of the peoples of this world as they fight for life and live the agony of sorrow.

Such love always makes me stand in awe of this wondrous God who loves us with such a fierce love that knows no boundaries. God who is love became one with us in our frailty and humanity.

We had a new hymn to sing – which will now have to wait for another day. It expresses all we can do, if we are honest, in response to such amazing love.

My God, accept my heart this day

1. My God, accept my heart this day,
and make it still your own,
that I from you no more may stray,
but follow you alone.
2. Before the cross of him who died
in penitence I fall;
let every sin be crucified,
and Christ be Lord of all.
3. Anoint me with your heavenly grace,
and seal me for your own,
that I may see your glorious face,
and worship near your throne.
4. Let every thought and work and word
to you be ever given;
then life shall be your service, Lord,
and death the gate of heaven.

Matthew Bridges 1800-94